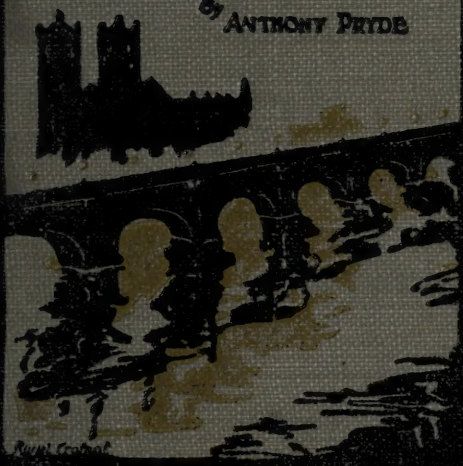


MARQUESSAY'S DUEL

By ANTHONY PRIDE





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Marquerray's Duel

BY ANTHONY PRYDE
MARQUERAY'S DUEL



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MARQUESS DUFF

Marqueray's Duel

By ANTHONY PRYDE



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Marguerite's Duel



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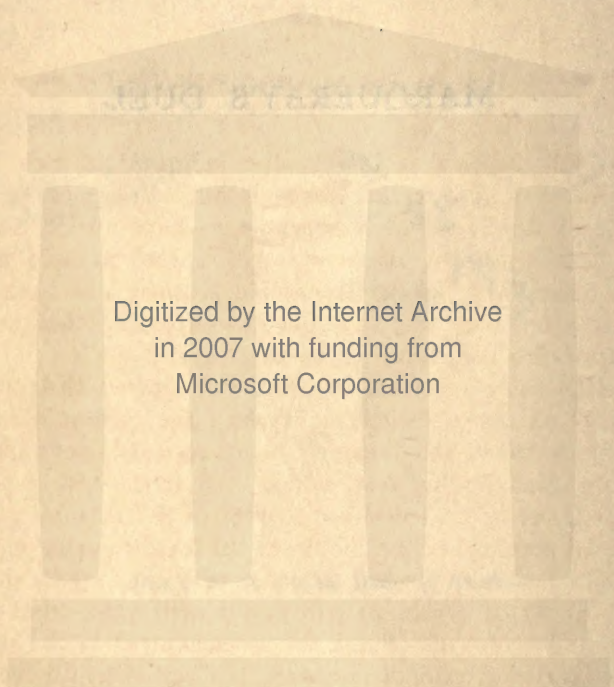
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CHAPTER I

No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that; you mar all with this starting.

“SIR, I leave it to—er—the judgment of this House to decide whether—er—the subject ought to be taken out of the hands of men who—er—have always handled it conscientiously, and now it is proposed to hand it over to others who, as the Honorable Member who spoke will last agree with me, have not the experience which—er—experience has shown to be necessary. . . .”

Honorable Members coughed and cleared their throats softly all over a dwindling House. The distinguished solitary tenant of the Treasury Bench leaned back, folded his arms, put up his feet against the table, and gaped as though he would have liked to swallow the Honorable Member at present holding the floor. In the Strangers' Gallery, which had been packed to listen to Yarborough's defense of his South American policy, one man after another got up and went out. From the seats allotted to the private secretaries of cabinet ministers, Aubrey West, in the middle of a sympathetic yawn, caught a nod and something very like a wink from his sardonic chief, and escaped like a boy let out of school.

From the dim, roof-lighted sanctuary of the House, from its droned monologue and hushed footfalls, he came forth into the roar and glitter of the night life of London. The Westminster chimes had just finished striking a quarter to eleven; their plaintive tones were still floating high in air.

Over the dry and polished floor of the square, in and out among its plots of greenery, victims of the supertax went their silken way. West himself was going home to bed. After a hard day's work he was tired and sleepy, and he detached himself as soon as he could from men who stopped to offer him vicarious congratulations on the Foreign Minister's success. But there are some people who cannot be shaken off, and as he turned out of New Palace Yard, a light dragging step caught him up, and a hand seized his arm—"Aubrey, wait a bit, one never gets a chance of speaking to you nowadays; you may be as busy as you like, but you shouldn't run away from old friends——"

"I was running away from Totteridge Needham, whose oratory is enough to put any one to flight," said West, submitting with his usual patience to be buttonholed by the man whom of all others he most disliked—if a man who makes excuses for every one can strictly be said to dislike any one. "But what are you doing down here, Lord Marchmont? Didn't I see you in the Lobby talking to Freddy Hope? You don't often honor us."

"No, dear fellow, and if the distressing Needham is a fair specimen I can't conceive how anybody can," returned Marchmont with his thin, affected laugh. It was a warm October night, one of the early nights of the autumn session, but he was wearing a thick coat over his evening dress and a high fur collar turned up round his chin: the heavy sables were as characteristic of him as the narrow hand, covered with bizarre rings, which was hooked firmly through West's unresponsive elbow. "I came down to pick up a tip or two about your Peruvian activities, but I retire defeated. Yarborough says nothing, and Needham has nothing to say. Is it infectious, Aubrey? When you get into the national kindergarten, will you too become a dribbler without a bib?"

"I don't see any prospect of my getting in at present."

"Glad to hear it," was the cheerful reply. "There are

too many honest men in Parliament already; I often sigh for the dear old days before the war when we were all frankly on the make. Give you my word, if I were beginning life again, I wouldn't be a millionaire. It is no longer a profession for a gentleman. Where are you off to?"

"To my bed. I only came to hear Yarborough speak. If you don't mind, I'll be moving on——"

"He doesn't dribble. For that matter he's not so honest as some of you young fellows. But, heavens, I oughtn't to say so to you!—What a night!" Marchmont raised his pale-blue eyes to the hunter's moon, hanging cold and serene over the city's chequerwork of white and black shadows and colored lamps at war with her celestial fairness. "You can't want to go to bed yet. Come and have supper with me. There's a place turning out of Birdcage Walk where they give you the best Indian curry in London and girls to match—Lucknow dancing girls, the real thing——"

"Too fagged," said West; "thanks all the same."

He was not tempted to accept Marchmont's well-meaning invitation,—it would have been worse than Totteridge Needham,—but he was both amused and puzzled by it. Marchmont still had him by the arm, and from his manner one would have thought that he and West were intimate friends, but in point of fact they never met except in other people's houses. A man of five-and-forty, the grandson of a South African Jew who had subscribed heavily to party funds out of the proceeds—so men said—of what is colloquially known as "I.D.B.," Marchmont was never known to do anything but spend money: while West was a hardworking young man, country born and bred, who had taken with him into political life the traditions of an open-air upbringing. He had nothing in common with Marchmont, and he could only suppose that Marchmont wanted to get something out of him: greater men than Marchmont sometimes came to West for Foreign Office

"tips"—which he never gave them: but he was surprised, for he had never heard that Marchmont took much interest in politics.

"You won't? Well, I'll stroll part of the way home with you," said Marchmont amiably. Probably he saw that West was longing to be rid of him; he had an irritating knack of reading other men's thoughts. "Let's see, you keep somewhere over Chelsea way, don't you? Heavens, how that barbarian *argot* clings to one's lips! I had a lively time at Cambridge. I recollect that after one æsthetic debate my heavy-handed friends removed my clothing and spread me with my own jam and the feathers out of my own bolster." West said nothing. He was a much younger man than Marchmont, but he had some dim recollection of the particular offense which Marchmont had expiated in jam and feathers, and he thought that in Marchmont's shoes he would not have recalled it. "But I horrify you, don't I?" said Marchmont. "You youngsters, Aubrey, were brought up to take a much more moral view of life than we did when I was your age. Well, what is morality, after all? I should define it as organized interference with other people's pleasures——"

West waited to light a cigarette, less for the sake of smoking than because he wanted a pretext for withdrawing his arm from Marchmont's. He did not think of himself as more fastidious than other men, but Marchmont's scented proximity repelled him. They had by now passed the Victoria Tower and the riverside gardens and were strolling along the Embankment: a mild west wind was blowing downstream, and under a flood of moonlight the Thames lay like an expanse of polished mail, so hard and bright that one could imagine oneself walking on it, except in tracts here and there where it was warped and ripple-fretted by the pull of an unseen current. Dry leaves drifted and rustled underfoot, and an ebbing tide left in the air a salt tang of the tumbling North Sea. West, a

confirmed Londoner, would have enjoyed his walk home if he had been alone, through the riverside purlieus of Westminster and Chelsea, under the tarnished sycamores and the high walls of deserted wharves, but he could not pursue his own thoughts in peace while Marchmont hung on his arm.

"You mustn't let me drag you out of your way," he said in his gentle, disengaged voice. "I live miles from here, the other side of Chelsea Bridge." Marchmont smiled: if West thought his companion could be shaken off by a polite hint without saying what he came to say, West was mistaken, that was all. But there were limits to West's patience: "Had you anything to ask me? For if not I must hurry on."

Marchmont's thin, fair face became perfectly vacant. His shifty eyes flickered up and down the lighted road. He could have wished that West had not halted close to a lamp-post. Still, it was late, and there were not many people about; the lantern still burned in the Clock Tower, a sign that riverside members who were under orders to stay for the division would not be coming home yet awhile; the head lamps of a car shone towards them out of the shadows of Westminster, but it was a long way off.

"The fact is, I did want to ask you something," he said, taking hold of West by a button of his coat, "only you're such an impracticable fellow; not that I don't respect your scruples, my dear boy, and honor you for them, but it's folly to push them too far. These new commercial arrangements that Yarrow is concluding with the Latin-American States. . . ." He waited for a breath or two. West was silent. "I hold some Peruvian stock, and I know a good bit about the country and the men in it. If I could get a few details twenty-four hours before the rest of the world. . . . Oh, nothing of any consequence, nothing strictly confidential; I shouldn't dream of coming to you for an official secret. But there are small points . . .

de Glehn, for example, I can't make out whether he's going to keep his job as Minister of Railways or not. I dare say you know all about it, don't you? That's the sort of harmless detail that would be worth a good deal to me." West remained silent. Was he fighting against temptation? Words spoken without a witness can always be denied. West was fighting against a temptation to throw the hereditary lawgiver into the Thames, but how was Marchmont to know that? What he did know was that West was an ambitious man and not very well off. "Worth a good round sum," said Marchmont. "I should put it well into four figures, Aubrey—here, I say, where the devil's this thing coming to?"

West stood his ground, but Marchmont without any of his usual affectation skipped up on the pavement. The distant car, a racing Raymond-Ray, had run past them in a deceptive silence, and so close that her near wheels came within arm's length. But she was slowing down, and her driver, a tall man in serge clothes and a Panama hat, leaned across to look hard at West, jammed on his brakes, and pulled up within his own length: then, springing out, and signing to his chauffeur to take his place, strolled back with a faint, mischievous smile on his bronzed features.

"Well, West, you haven't forgotten me, have you?"

West, who hated a scene of any sort, was grateful for the interruption, but for a moment, taken by surprise and hampered by the uncertain light, he could only apologize and fumble for his eyeglass with the nervous and guilty haste of a short-sighted man. "No, I'm sure I haven't. Only I am such a duffer at faces——"

"Marqueray."

"Marqueray? So it is, by Jove! Where is my eyeglass——?"

"Hanging down your back," said Marqueray, his smile broadening.

"Oh, thanks—so it is. Well, I ought to have known

you! You're not much altered. But I thought you were—where was it? The Rockies or, no, the Andes, I recollect Mr. Vere's telling me you had shot a coraquenque. Well, well, and so you're home again for five minutes?"

"I got back on Wednesday," said Marqueray, shaking hands with him. "How are you, Marchmont?" He threw the elder man a not very cordial nod. "Going strong, I trust? You look a little the worse for wear.—West, I've just come from your shop. I was in the Strangers' Gallery. I meant to nail you on your way out, but you slipped off so quietly I never saw you go. Anyhow, I should have looked you up to-morrow. I feel as lonely as Robinson Crusoe; no, Rip van Winkle, wasn't that the beggar I mean? I went round to my club this afternoon, but the entire population seems to have shifted in my absence. Queer how one drops out of things in the course of a couple of years!"

"Oh, you'll soon drop in again. You've been away so much," West answered mildly. "Have you seen Mr. Vere yet?—you're not staying with him?"

"No, I'm in my old quarters in Whitehall Court. Bobby has his little ways, and I have mine. He doesn't like my unpunctuality, and I draw the line at his footmen. I shall probably stay in London till the winter if London will be civil to me. Shan't if it isn't."

"Begin by having supper with me and make West come too," suggested Marchmont, with the flexibility of his race. Although Marqueray had cut in at the critical moment, Marchmont bore him no grudge, for when a man dallies with temptation, Time is the devil's ally. Unluckily for Marchmont, however, he was now dealing with different stuff from the gentle-mannered Londoner.

"Not for worlds," Marqueray replied with the genial insolence which endeared him to some of those who did not suffer from it. "Where is it now, March? Last time I had supper with you it was a cubbyhole in Persian Street,

absinthe, cubism, and young women with the thickest ankles I ever saw. These things don't do themselves twice. But don't let me detain you."

Marchmont smiled, not visibly offended. "Thanks, I'm walking home with West."

Marqueray turned to exchange a steady glance with his cousin over Marchmont's head. West was of middle height, Marqueray a very tall man: West, slight, fair-haired, gray-eyed, in no way remarkable except for his depth of brow, had the rather worn and bleached look of a Londoner who does a good deal of hard brain work by candle light, while Marqueray, to judge by his bold blue eyes *à fleur de tête* and features burnt by sun, snow, and wind to a uniform dark copper color, spent his life on deck or in the saddle. But, unlike as they were, they had in common certain general characteristics—soft voices, a pleasantly frank outlook, shoulders ironed flat by drill—which set them in a class apart from the elder man. Marqueray's eyes said to West, "Can't you get rid of this fellow? I want to talk to you," but West, though sympathetic, shook his head. Short of open insult or violence, there was no known way of getting rid of Hamon, Lord Marchmont.

It ended in their all three strolling on together, Marqueray sending away his car and talking to West over the top of Marchmont's head. West, whose quick temper had had time to cool, would have let Marchmont come into the conversation on his side, for after all what is the use of resenting an insult which the man who offers it would never resent? But his cousin was less catholic, and as soon as Marchmont got in, Marqueray, always deft and genial, shouldered him out again. It was hard on Marchmont because Marqueray's talk, prompted by the debate to which he had just been listening, ran on the very subjects in which Marchmont was interested: Yarborough's foreign policy, and more particularly the commercial treaties with the friendly Latin-American States which had been en-

gaging English attention on and off since the war. Marqueray was neither politician nor financier. As he said to West, he had no ax to grind. But in the course of a twelve-month spent in knocking up and down the South Pacific seaboard, he had gathered from every class every shade of unofficial opinion, and his shrewd comments amused West—the comments of a leisured and far-wandered Englishman who pays a large income-tax and likes to get good value for it. They would have amused him more if he could have forgotten Marchmont's itching ears. Yet one could not call Marqueray indiscreet. He was carelessly careful of his cousin's responsibility. Indeed, if he had been bred a diplomat instead of a member of the Alpine and Travelers' Clubs, he could not have picked his steps more happily between *dicenda* and *tacenda*. It had been so, West remembered, in the old days: and certainly, for a pure sportsman, Marqueray in his political allusions was either very deft or very lucky.

Past the Tait Gallery, moon-blanced in its green court; past wharves where cranes hooked up their elbows high against the stars, and where the figurehead of some old *Mermaid* or *Dolphin*, once washed by green seas, loomed up like a marine ghost over a tangle of timber and iron-work; along the broad boulevard of Grosvenor Road beyond the railway bridges, its doll's-house terraces, demurely foreign in peaked balcony and striped blind, peering far out over the river at the dim hulks of barges careened on the opposite shore. West rented a small house in one of the streets that lie behind Cheyne Walk. He longed for supper and his own fireside, but he dared not make for it till he had got rid of Marchmont. He knew that he would be weak enough to ask Marchmont in, and that Marchmont would come if it were only because he knew he wasn't wanted.

"What a topping night!" said Marqueray. "Let us stroll across Chelsea Bridge and admire the lights o' Lon-

don. I like any old brook by night, don't you, West?" He was mischievously counting on the certainty that Marchmont, who never went anywhere on foot and was not fond of scenery, must be getting very tired. Marchmont groaned, but Marqueray as usual carried his amendment, and they strolled together along the western footway of the bridge, past the bridgewardens' tower and his little cabbage plot, West in the middle and Marchmont next the parapet. Broad and tranquil, the Thames crept seaward, all silk and steel. Beyond the dark woods of Battersea and Chelsea, still dense with leaves though the smell of frost was in the air, three tall factory chimneys rose up like pointing fingers against the dim horizon. Autumnal stars, the few that Selene could not extinguish, shone with a greenish brilliance over the furnace-glow diffused by the great sleepless city: while up stream and down stream, from bridge and shore, from signal arm and crawling train, from locked wharf and moored barge, the lamps of London, topaz, and garnet, and emerald, burned like barbaric jewels over the snow of October moonlight. Faint, from far away down stream, there came to them the blast of a ship's siren, the high melancholy hoot that speaks to men of landfalls and departures, of changed conditions and broken ends of life.

"Not so many autumns ago, West," said Marqueray, following some imaginative and personal train of thought, "you and I were shivering at the bottom of a trench near Houthulst Forest, counting our last ten minutes by my watch."

"Yes, for a night attack. I vividly recollect how wet I was, and how frightened."

"Very good, and this is what we were fighting for." Marqueray pointed with his brown hand first to the lights of London down stream, and then up at the twin towers overhead lettered in gold: GLORIA DEO IN EXCELSIS. "Queer, isn't it?"

"Ah, I'm not English," said Marchmont coolly. "I didn't have to fight, and I don't envy you the experience—Good God!"

He leaped back with a frightened cry. It was getting on for twelve o'clock, and there were few people about; the bridge was as nearly deserted as any London road ever is at any hour of the day or night; and none of them had seen that there was a young girl sitting by the parapet in the bay of the western tower, till at the sound of Marchmont's voice she rose uncertainly to her feet.

"What on earth is the matter, Lord Marchmont?" said West.

He fairly drew Marchmont's hand through his arm: and the elder man leaned on him in such a state of collapse that West could not help feeling sorry for him. It told of broken health or broken nerves.

"It's all right," West said, trying to soothe his companion, "there's nothing to be nervous about. No one's going to worry you." For the girl had drooped down again on the parapet as if deaf to everything but the broad current which sucked and lipped on the pier below: a small, indistinct shape in a dark dress and shawl and a wide-brimmed hat, of whom West could see little except that she was carrying a bundle which might or might not have been a sleeping child. Yet Marchmont's eyes were riveted on her, and his terror was unabated. "What is the matter with you?" West's irritation grew as a couple of working men went by, casting hard, inquisitive glances on the panic-stricken figure in its furs and flashing rings. Marqueray, standing apart, watched the scene with critical and extremely unsympathetic amusement. "Look here, do pull yourself together! Chelsea Bridge isn't a sufficiently secluded spot for seeing ghosts——"

"Ghosts!" Marchmont wrenched himself free. His eyes were quite wild. "What the devil do you mean by that? She's not dead: women don't die so easily——"

"Hallo! Hallo!" said Marquera. .

He lounged forward, while West, horrified, dropped Marchmont's arm. "Not dead, March? Let's have a look at her and make sure. There, you see if ever you did murder any one it wasn't this young lady."

Gently he had raised her head, the head of a young girl, almost a child, thin and delicate and ivory-pale: no color anywhere except for the beautiful dark blue eyes under curling dark hair: and almost no sign of life, for she let it rest against his hand, without a tremor, except that the young breast under her cotton shirt rose and fell again in a quick, faint sigh.

Marquera drew back, a trifle disconcerted. But the effect on Marchmont was galvanic. He turned round and ran away, and West was obliged to follow him: however little he desired the post of Marchmont's male nurse, he could not leave the elder man to himself and the apparent danger of his falling down in a fit. By the time West caught him up at the end of the bridge, however, his scattered faculties had returned to him, though whether from relief or dismay West couldn't tell: he was not ashamed or apologetic, not a whit: it was part of Marchmont's code never to be ashamed of anything. "Did I startle you? I was startled myself. That girl reminded me of a woman I used to know. There was no real likeness—a look in the eyes, perhaps." He wiped his forehead with a scented handkerchief. "Some day I'll tell you the story, but not now."

"I don't want to hear it," West muttered.

Marchmont was deaf at times. "I couldn't tell you now. Is that an empty taxi coming along? Ah, then I'm afraid I'd better take it, Aubrey—thanks all the same for asking me back—I'll come in some other day. I should be poor company to-night."

West was only too happy to put his companion into the cab, where Marchmont buried himself in a corner and

pulled up his fur collar over his ears: and then, with the tenacity of his race, sticking to his point, which West had forgotten, "And you'll remember what I said about the four figures? Mind you let me have a line to-morrow—ta ta, Marqueray—my God, I do want a drink!"

West and Marqueray by common consent turned to face each other. "Thank heaven, he's gone, anyhow," said Marqueray after a pregnant pause. "I never met any one so unreal in my life. Look here, West, I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER II

His very hair is of the dissembling color.

BUT Marqueray could not, nor could West, at once detach his thoughts from what had just happened; and though they were at the north end of the bridge, and within a few minutes' walk of West's house, West did not turn in that direction. Indeed, he looked as though natural politeness were struggling in him with a desire to be rid of Marqueray too. Marqueray, however, showed no disposition to move away. He stood looking after the red rear lamps of the cab till his perplexities issued in a leading question: "I didn't know you saw much of Marchmont?"

"I don't. He turned up at the House to-night for some reason of his own, saw me there, and followed me out. I haven't spoken to him twice since Goodwood. That doesn't prevent him from rushing up to me and throwing himself into my arms," said West, fuming with irritation, which Marchmont's Parthian shot had revived. "I can't stand him at any price, and I believe he's mad."

"Will be, if he goes on drugging himself at his present rate. If he isn't an intimate friend of yours, you won't mind my saying that the little brute is chock full of morphia."

"How do you know?"

"Marks on his forearm," said Marqueray laconically. "I saw them when he was capering about on the bridge, and if you weren't as blind as a bat you might have seen them too. But perhaps you wouldn't have known what they were!—Well, people said after the war London was supposed to be going to reform a bit, but if it allows in-

sects like March to crawl over it, I shall return to the Pacific. Is he popular?"

"Is it likely? Did you hear what he had the impudence to say to me when he was in the cab?" West burst out. He really did not feel bound to respect Marchmont's confidence. "Just before you came up to us on the Embankment, he was offering me money—me! money!—to give him tips about the new commercial arrangements with Peru. 'Twenty-four hours before the rest of the world,' he said, and 'it would run well into four figures.' Four figures! To me, that never in my life——! The little, miserable, dirty Jew!"

"Well, you should have pocketed it," said Marqueray cynically. "He couldn't have dunned you for it."

"Wretched little sweep! And then you came up, and I couldn't even give him a piece of my mind." West began to laugh, his brow clearing. "Well, well, I apologize for getting so hot, but really, really——!"

"Peru, did you say?" echoed Marqueray carelessly. "And four figures? That's a long price. I wonder what he stood to get out of it. He's got any amount of money, hasn't he? But he wants more, like the rest of us. Probably he holds a lot of shares in some Peruvian company. Has he any head for finance?"

"I tell you I don't know anything about him, and I don't want to. The only thing one can say for him is that he's never had much of a chance," West added in a kindlier tone. "His grandfather, old Jo Marchmont, made his money on the Rand, no one seems to know how; I've heard Mr. Vere declare that so long as the old man was alive one never met any South Africans at his table, but that may be scandal. The second generation bought the title with a check to King Edward's Hospital Fund, and his wife, this man's mother, ran away with a fellow in the Lancers. Between the three of them, he was rather heavily handicapped."

"Ah! I recognize your charitable spirit," said Marqueray. "I don't recognize your hospitable spirit, though. Aren't you going to ask me in?" West was taken aback, and showed it, making Marqueray laugh. "Oh, I'm so sorry, I was only joking! It's close on midnight, isn't it? I know you always were an early bird——"

"I want to speak to that child on the bridge."

"Child on the bridge?"

"Didn't you notice her? She was quite young—sixteen or seventeen—and very pretty."

"Oh," said Marqueray. He fell back a step and stood looking down at West with an astonishment which was three parts disappointment, and which he made scarcely any effort to disguise. "Well, the little village is much the same as ever, evidently. But I thought you——However——good-night, West."

"Oh, aren't you coming too?" said West, his face falling. "Do! I wish you would."

Preoccupied, he never saw, then or later, why Marqueray examined him so keenly or why after a moment his merry, mocking laugh rang out again as he seized his cousin by the arm.

"Ha ha! I beg your pardon, my dear West, I should have remembered that you never could pass a lame dog in the street. But lame dogs aren't so difficult to cope with as little girls. Let her alone: she can look after herself. That class have as shrewd an eye to the main chance as any other class on earth." West smiled and shook his head. "But she was that class, you know," said Marqueray gently.

"I think not."

"What did you take her for, then—a respectable working girl? Rot! let her alone. She was much too pretty to be respectable—they never are when they're so pretty as all that. What do you know about it?"

"You were watching Marchmont, you scarcely looked

at the child;" West stuck to his point, though Marqueray's hard banter brought the color into his face. "There was more in it than you saw. Marchmont knew her."

"I don't think so. She startled him out of his life, and he took her for a ghost. His past is probably lurid, and he's all gin and morphia."

"He knew her: and she knew him," West repeated. "I was nearer to her than you were, and when she first heard his voice and turned round I heard her say, 'Oh, Hamon!' under her breath. He has a vile bad name with women"—Marqueray shrugged his shoulders: it was waste of breath to tell him that. "And the child was innocent, or relatively so. Anyhow, whatever you say, I'm going back. I can't leave a young thing like that to her own resources at this time of night. I should never get her out of my head if I did. Chelsea Bridge is miles off the usual beat. What was she doing down there by the river?"

Marqueray was profoundly skeptical and profoundly amused, but he liked his cousin the better for his folly. Marqueray was not a man of wide sympathies. Like many who have lived much among uncivilized races, he had to some extent assimilated their standards, and his own code of morals was easy. He was not cruel or treacherous, but he was careless, and would have left the child to her fate without a second thought, in the easy certainty that the way of the world is, in the long run, the wiser way, and that a pretty little girl who has not enough strength of character to keep out of the mire deserves to be trodden down in it. But men are often drawn to natures which are rather complementary than correspondent to their own, and he felt drawn to West by his simplicity and genuine, unaffected kindness, qualities which two years ago Marqueray had found rather absurd than attractive.

Turning and falling into step at West's side, his thoughts darted back over their—could it be called friendship? Hardly: if they had ever been friends, West would not

have failed to recognize him after a couple of years. That Marqueray had known West at a glance might have argued a certain disparity in their mutual attitude, if Marqueray had not possessed such a Royal memory for faces that he rarely forgot any one he had ever met. But they had known or known of each other all their lives. They had gone to the same public school; in the war they had served for a time in the same regiment; and when peace came, and West went into political life, while Marqueray disappeared from town on successive shooting expeditions, they were kept in touch by a common link. Marqueray had neither father nor mother, sister nor brother, but when in town he lived in fairly close intimacy with his uncle, Robert Vere; and Vere was a politician, a distant relative and country neighbor of West's parents, and by a natural sequence of events the godfather and patron of their eldest son.

Marqueray had now a private motive for drawing all these loose links of intimacy closer. That was a business proposition. Natures, however, develop new needs as they grow older, and Marqueray, for all his distrust of sentiment, felt warm at heart as he walked back with West over Chelsea Bridge, shortening his long strides to keep pace with the Londoner's footsteps.

Marqueray was at a period of change. A solitary by upbringing and a nomad by taste, he had had comrades to whom he had remained loyal to the death, but he had never given or wished to give them his confidence. Of late, however, now that he was getting into the thirties, and still nothing lay before him but club life or foreign service, he had begun to wonder whether it would not be agreeable to take a friend to his bosom, before whom no mask need be worn and a rather lonely man need not be ashamed to open his heart. Most men in such a frame of mind would have turned to marriage, but not Marqueray. He ruled a line between women good and bad, which allowed

for no such gradations as went to make up his shrewd and easy-going judgment of men; and good women he found dull and difficult to get along with, while the others made occasionally pleasant companions but never wives. What he wanted was a friend: but why West? The wind of affection bloweth whither it listeth. "Like will to like," says one proverb. "Like will to unlike" is at least equally true. Marqueray, cautious and cynical, was obliged to chaff his cousin in self-defense, because he was more touched than he would have cared to confess.

"She is safe to have been moved on by this time," West said apologetically. Having no clew to Marqueray's mind, he was naturally feeling shy, self-conscious, and ashamed as Englishmen usually are of a good action. "I wonder we haven't met a policeman before, but it's a long bridge, and the double gangway——"

He broke off as they reached the bay. No, she had not budged: there she was, her small head bent on the parapet, her arms still cradling the small bundle which—as Marqueray realized in a sudden dismay—could hardly be a living child. Her immobility, her desolation startled Marqueray and inclined him to revise his earlier judgment and to admit some excuse for West. She was young to be left alone in the icy midnight moonlight, and so near to the great river.

West, whose manners were the same for all women, took off his hat and spoke to her bareheaded. "My child, do you know what time it is? Do you want to catch a bad cold? Why don't you go home?"

A small, flat, and muffled voice answered as if automatically, "I've not any home."

"Oh, nonsense, every one has a home somewhere!" In contact with distress, West soon forgot that Marqueray was standing by, a detached, critical, and probably jeering spectator. "Come, look up at me." She raised her head, and again both West and Marqueray were struck by her eyes,

their deerlike softness, their bewildered childish misery. "My poor little girl," said West, laying his hand on her shoulder, "I'm afraid you're in great trouble. What's the matter, tell me?"

"Are ye——"

"Am I a friend of the gentleman who was with me just now—is that what you were going to ask?"

"What gentleman?" she said: and then after a moment, literally making even the seasoned Marqueray's blood run cold, "Are ye the man Mrs. Carter said would come and speak to me if I went out into the street?"

"God forgive us all!" West murmured. "Who is Mrs. Carter?"

"Me landlady. I owe her seventeen and sixpence half-penny, and she said I was a thief and that I wouldn't ever pay her if I didn't go into the street."

"But she never told you to come down here?"

"No, she said Regent Street. But I walked and I walked, and nobody ever did speak to me, and I liked the quieter streets where there weren't so many lights, and so at last I came by the river. 'Tisn't *proibito* to sit here, is it? I'm so tired." She drooped down again, shivering under her shawl.

"What's that you're carrying?" said West very gently. "May I see?—It can't be: the woman never would have sent her out for that purpose with a child in her arms!"

"Oh! nothing."

"Nothing?"

"'Tis just play," said the child softly. "I made it up to pretend it was me little boy."

"Why, you're nothing but a baby yourself!" West exclaimed. "Don't tell me you have one of your own?"

"Not now. I did have, but he died while we were in the workhouse."

"Powers of darkness!" said Marqueray under his breath. "West, are you believing this tale?"

"Aren't you?"

Marqueray took off his cap and ran his fingers through his Judas-colored hair. "When I was six and twenty I shouldn't have believed a word of it, but one lives and learns. It hasn't wits enough to originate. And this, you think, is a bit of our friend March's handiwork?" He had drawn West aside, and in the moonlight his blue eyes, gleaming like steel, rather belied his half-jesting manner. "He knows a good thing when he sees it. But what on earth are two respectable young men like ourselves going to do with her? She ought to go to the casual ward. Hang it, she speaks like a lady." A late journalist on his way to Fleet Street, notebook and pencil in hand, stared hard, as if scenting "copy," at the waif in the shadow of the bridge: a couple of working women going home to bed stared harder and with unconcealed hostility at the gentlemen whom it was natural to regard as her enemies. At any moment the Law might come up, with inconvenient and possibly disastrous results.

"I wish I knew," said West candidly. "You can't stay here, my child. Think, there's going to be a frost, you'll be perished with cold before morning. Where does this woman live—this Mrs. Carter?"

"In Hatchard's Rents. But I'd rather stay here, the way there won't be any one calling me a thief: unless"—a happy thought evidently striking her—"ye would be so very kind as to come too? Meself, I don't see what good it would do, but she said she wouldn't let me in the house again unless I brought a man with me."

Her eyes were the eyes of a child. Incredible as it appeared, not even Marqueray was able to doubt her fairy-tale innocence.

"The casual ward is the place for her," Marqueray repeated. An expiring flicker of common sense: as he said it he knew that he was not going to submit this unhappy, ruined child to a renewal of workhouse hospitality.

"If my sister were in town——" said West: "but she's at home, unluckily."

What made their situation more difficult was that the child herself had no grasp of it at all. She was a bit of driftwood that would float with any stream. She answered when West spoke to her, but it was easy to see that he touched only the surface of her mind, and when he ceased to prompt her she relapsed into mere quiescence. She was so dazed by fatigue and cold and hunger, and by the other tragic chances which had befallen her and which in her nursery innocence she only half understood, that every spring was broken. Why shouldn't she sit on the bridge all night? It was at least quiet by the river, where no one was rude or actively unkind to her. Probably if West had said to her "You will die," she would have answered "Oh, I wish I would!"

"Is not that," said Marqueray, "the measured tread of our enemy in blue?"

At the same moment they heard a cab turning over the bridge from Battersea. West was tolerably prompt to act under the spur of an emergency. "Jump up, you're coming with me," he said, and the waif meekly let him slip her hand through his arm and draw her to her feet. "I shall take her home," he explained rather curtly. Marqueray raised his eyebrows, amazed and amused. "I didn't want to because my housekeeper, the woman who looks after me, is rather a trying party: she has the temper of a Nonconformist conscience, and I'm not at all sure that the little guest will have a good time. But she's a woman after all, and her husband is a decent fellow, and I can at least make them give the child supper and a bed. Come, little girl," as Marqueray raised his hand and the taxi-cab drew up at the end of the bridge, "slip in here. You would like some tea, wouldn't you, and a warm fire, and a comfortable sleep?—Time enough to settle the rest to-morrow."

His manner was that of any educated man to any lady, and he spoke too low to be overheard. But the child was not dressed for her part. " 'Ere, I say, guv'nor!" said the chauffeur, dismayed for his cushions.

"That will do, my man," said Marqueray, chafing. He slipped his hand into his pocket while West half supported, half lifted the little unresisting figure into the cab. It was evident that she would have gone wherever they took her, and it was probable, unless some premature brutality had wakened a dormant instinct of self-preservation, that she would have gone as readily with any other man. When Marqueray, after pacifying the cabman, returned to say good-night to West, she was sitting by his side in a melancholy little heap, her eyes shut, her slender shoulders rounded and drooping in the laxity of fatigue: her bundle lay on her knee, and Marqueray could see it for what it was—a torn silk petticoat tied up with bits of string into a rag doll. It shook his lingering skepticism. It was too fantastic to be less than a bit of bare truth. But equally he did not doubt that the rag doll, and not her shabby clothes, had saved her from the fate which waits every night on her fallen sisters of the pavement. Why had no man spoken to her? Not because she was down at heels and wrapped in a tramp's shawl, but for the sake of the child in her arms, which set her apart from that unholy, barren class.

"But, West, what are you going to do with it? *You* can't look after it!"

"How on earth can I tell what I'm going to do with her?" said West, irritated. "There are societies, aren't there, that are supposed to look after these cases——"

"But she is a lady," said Marqueray in a low voice. He lifted the small hand, very dirty, that lay uncurled on her knee. "Or not far off it. Look at those fingernails——"

"Loose, loose my hand—how dare you touch me?"

In her flame of affronted dignity she was so like a cross

child that West really thought she was going to slap Marqueray, and to judge by the celerity with which he dropped her fingers Marqueray thought so too. But West had no leisure to enjoy his cousin's confusion, for the chauffeur—a family man of Socialist leanings, bred in mistrust of every class above his own—turned round and peered in through the glass front. The way of transgressors is not so hard as that of virtue in an ambiguous situation. “Drive on!” cried West, hot all over. He had a horrible fear that the man was going to make a scene. Indeed, it was only Marqueray's formidably hard stare and the gold coin from his pocket that saved them. The engine picked up, the cylinders began to hum along a rising scale; Marqueray shrugged his shoulders and fell back, raising his cap.

“May I look in to-morrow and hear what happens?”

“Do,” said West hurriedly. “Dine with me, will you? Eight-thirty, but come early and we'll thrash it out.”

CHAPTER III

Lozel, thou art worthy to be hanged,
That wilt not stay her tongue.

Hang all the husbands
That cannot do that feat, you'll leave yourself
Hardly one subject.

MARQUERAY once gone, the child relapsed into sleep, or stupor, or was it mere exhaustion? At all events, when the cab stopped before the dark, unlit entry of No. 25, she seemed very much inclined to remain in her corner. . . . West, suffering such modest torments as the guilty never suffer, and aware that he had none of Marqueray's knack of quelling storms, was weak enough to overpay the chauffeur, who still looked as if he would have liked to raise a hue and cry: West was far from blaming him: indeed, he was almost as much disappointed as relieved when Democracy pocketed his indignation with his double fare. But after all, Democracy said to himself, the young woman, "doped" or sober, was evidently not respectable, and so she didn't much signify: Marqueray's opinion in a lower key, if Marqueray had only known it!—The cab drove away and left West standing in the moon-blanced Georgian solitudes of Vivian Street, alone with his embarrassing stray.

Like most men who engage in political life even at second hand, West kept irregular hours, and his standing orders were that the Fieldens should leave a cold supper on the table and go to bed. On this particular night he wished he had been a less habitually considerate master, for he would have given anything to turn his guest over at once to female care. However, he was thankful to find,

when the door opened to his latch-key, that she was willing to come in, and thankful too that a liking for privacy had led him to rent a tiny house in preference to chambers or a flat: an expensive taste, but one richly repaid to West's mind by the comfort of having only his own good servants on the premises. It was a cramped, strait house three stories high, its front beautified by a stucco porch and a bay window, its rear opening on a tiny grass plot where Fielden cultivated a few starveling flowers, and his wife, in scorn of London laundrywork, bleached her master's shirts. There were two sitting-rooms on the ground floor, West's large study on the left, where he smoked and worked and entertained his friends, and a much smaller room on the right where he ate his meals. Opening the door into the latter, he reflected that Mrs. Fielden, if she had the temper of a Nonconformist conscience, had its virtues too. All was exquisitely in order: his old-fashioned mahogany furniture was polished till it shone again, and the foreign habit of sweeping a carpet with tea leaves or rose petals kept the air sweet: and on the hearth burned what Northerners call "a raking coal," dim, but ready at a touch to scatter into flame, while a shaded lamp in the middle of the supper table lit up a glowing islet of fine damask and sparkling glass.

A genial change from the blue frost of moonlight on the bridge! But the child followed West in without any sign of gutter timidity or surprise, and slipped quite naturally, as if used to being waited on, into the easy chair which he drew up to the fire. And yet she was not only shabby and ragged but even dirty. She wore a blue serge skirt, a faded blue cotton blouse, and a frayed rush hat trimmed with daisies; no coat, no wrap of any sort except her grimy shawl: no gloves, no brooch, although her bodice, its top button hanging by a thread, would have been the better of a pin or two. West wondered why Mrs. Carter had not taken more pains to equip the novice for her trade. But

after all, if it had not been for the rag doll, what difference would her clothes have made? She would only have had to lift those long curling lashes and look up at the first night hawk she met out of those velvety, guileless, West-of-Ireland eyes. . . .

West took a hasty survey of his supper table. Cold fowl, tongue, apple tart, jelly—Mrs. Fielden was country born and bred, and Mrs. Fielden's imagination worked in a familiar groove. Unless he went to a restaurant, there was a good deal of roast and boiled chicken and apple tart and custard in West's menu. He did not much mind what he ate, and if any voice was raised in protest it was that of Fielden, who had been West's batman in his regimental days, and knew what was what, as he said, in the officers' mess. But Fielden's protests were meek and brief and never bore any fruit.

There was this to be said of Mrs. Fielden, that within her limits she was an excellent cook. West cut off a wing of chicken—the joint seemed to melt under his knife—and added the lion's share of a dainty mess of salad. "Will you come now and have something to eat?" he said, addressing the stray with the same kind simplicity that he would have shown to his own sister. "You must be hungry; it's getting very late."

"'Tis very, very good of you." She raised her hands to her hat, apparently from an instinct of politeness. West in his character of nursemaid would have liked to take it off for her, but after the destruction of Marqueray he didn't dare, and after a minute's vague fluttering her small fingers dropped again. "I'm so tired," she murmured, "d'ye mind if I keep me hat on? Me hands are black, too, oh dear!" But she was evidently too tired to want to wash them, and West made her sit to the table, not failing to notice as he did so the pretty way she moved, the instinctive grace with which she acknowledged his courtesy before seating herself, and her involuntary glance round for a

table napkin. Wasn't she hungry, after all? She left her plate untouched. It dawned on West presently that she was waiting for him to carve for himself.

"Do you mind beginning without me?" he said, hurriedly apologetic. "My servants are in bed, and I shall have to wake them up, but I should like to see you make a start before I go. Perhaps some wine——" She checked him.

"Please if I may have some water: I never drink wine."

Secretly a little relieved—for he was not sure what effect his Beaujolais would have on her in her dazed condition—West sat on the arm of his own chair and watched with an uncritical, sympathetic kindness this beggar-maid who never drank wine. Certainly she handled her knife and fork like one gently bred: one could not mistake that soft, refined dexterity. Hungry? She did not eat as though she were hungry: no fine lady could have been more dainty, more deliberate. And yet her left hand was ringless: she was a mother but not a wife. This mere child, won and worn and left to perish! Anger was an emotion foreign to West's quiet nature, but when he realized Marchmont's probable share in the tragedy he felt so hot that in common fairness he dared not let his mind dwell on it before proof.

"Now," he said, getting off his chair, "will you go on eating your supper like a good girl if I run away and leave you for five minutes? You see there's no room ready for you, and I'm sure you want to go to bed."

"Ye're very kind." Already his food was doing her good, her expression was a thought more intelligent and less wistful, and a tinge of pink—the pink of a China rosebud—was creeping into her cheeks. "'Tis a great deal of trouble I'm giving you. I—I don't know why you should be doing it all for me."

"Because I like to," West answered gaily, with a friendly parting smile. In the hall, at the foot of the stairs, he lingered, it may be owned, in the paralysis of trepidation:

once or twice before he had done something which the Non-conformist conscience considered improper, or, as she said herself, "unsootable"—but the rescue of a large and savage half-bred mastiff with a broken leg, who stretched himself out across the fire and growled whenever any one came near him, was a mild eccentricity compared with his present escapade. True, his motives were pure as the driven snow, but he was not at all sure that Mrs. Fielden would give him credit for them; and such is the perversity of male human nature that Lothario in an ambiguous situation never feels so hangdog as Galahad.

West screwed up his courage with more of an effort than it had ever cost him to get over a fire trench parapet, and went slowly upstairs. Passing the open door of his own room on the first landing, he found out that he was tired—dead tired in mind and body: he had had a long day of hard, responsible, exhausting toil, and his was not one of those seasoned natures that can work from morning till night without loss of energy. To make matters worse, he had had nothing to eat since lunch except four o'clock tea in Riseley Yarborough's drawing-room, and such a sketch of a dinner—a sole and a cup of coffee—as he was able to swallow in ten minutes at his club. He might have dined well and leisurely and driven down to the House with his chief,—Miss Yarborough had warmly seconded her father's invitation,—but he had preferred to be independent and uncomfortable. It was midnight now, and if he had only left the stray to her fate he would be finishing his own supper or on his way to bed. He was so tired that bed was more tempting to him than supper. Why, West wondered languidly, was he always doing things he didn't want to do? He could guess what short work Marqueray made of disagreeable obligations. But there was no help for it now. He could not look after the beggar-maid himself. Mrs. Fielden would have to come down and put her to bed: and West's immediate, painful duty was to uproot Mrs. Fielden.

He climbed a second flight of stairs to the upper landing. From a door on his left issued a very small and gentle snore: that was Annie, the parlormaid. From a door on his right issued two snores, one a grave singsong, continuous but musical, the other intermittent, short, and harsh: these were the several property of Mr. and Mrs. Fielden. West knocked timidly. The snores continued, all three, unabated. He knocked again, and louder. This time the only result was a cessation of Annie's gentle sighing. Dismay seized him in the conviction that Annie would shortly come out in her nightgown under the impression that he was Mrs. Fielden. West beat a really formidable tattoo on the other door, and raised his voice—"Eliza!"

Then all snores ceased at once, and an indefinable creaking and rustling proclaimed that the married pair had woken up. "Eliza, I want to speak to you," said West, trying not to sound as sheepish and apologetic as he felt. If he did not put a bold face on his errand, Mrs. Fielden was capable of going back to bed and staying there.

"It's the master," said Fielden's anxious baritone.

"Lor, I ope the ouse isn't on fire," said Mrs. Fielden. "I always sye e'll set imself on fire one o' these dyes readin in bed. Yes, sir, I'm comin as fast as I can. E's got no more sense than a biby."

Partitions in Vivian Street were thin. West heard her get out of bed, open a wardrobe, take from it some article of clothing, shuffle her feet into slippers—and then she opened the door: a smallish, thin woman, flat-chested, pink-eyed, sniff-nosed, and dressed in a red flannel dressing-gown, purple Berlin woolwork slippers, and a row of curl-papers. West had never in his life felt so desperately inclined to run away.

"I want you, Eliza, to come down and get a room ready for an unexpected visitor," he began, concealing his terror behind a Marquerayan coolness. But West was not Mar-

queray, and he soon weakened to a defensive attitude. "I'm very sorry to have to rout you out like this,—I know how late it is,—but it can't be helped for once."

"Git a room ready? Certingly, sir." West shivered; he was familiar with Mrs. Fielden's correct manner. "But you'll ave to wite till I put some cloes on, because I can't be stirrin round catchin my death o' cold in a dressin-gown. Reelly, Mr. Orbery, if you was to ask me, bein as ow it'll tike me the best part of a hower, not that I mind wich wye it is, but thinkin o' the gentleman imself, I shd sye e'd be more comftable if e was to go to a hotel."

"It isn't a gentleman, it's a young lady," said West. Now for it. "The fact is I've picked up an unfortunate little girl starving in the street, and I want you to come and see after her for me. She is quite without friends and she has been turned out of the house by her landlady."

Mrs. Fielden gazed at him as though she could hardly believe her ears. Dimly in the shadows of the room behind her West beheld, anxious and uneasy, Mr. Fielden wandering about in his nightshirt.

"Do I understand you to sye, sir, that you've brought ome a young person?"

"I suppose I must call her so; but she's hardly more than a child."

"An you wish me to get up an come down an put er to bed?"

"Well," said West with a weak attempt at jocosity, "I can't do it myself, can I?"

"Did you sye, sir, the young person was unfortunate?"

"If to be young and weak and unhappy is to be unfortunate,—yes, Eliza."

"Where was you thinkin of puttin er?"

"In the spare room, I suppose; where else? You keep it ready, don't you, except for the linen?"

"In the spare room. H'm," said Mrs. Fielden. "Nex

door to your own room, Mr. Orbery. . . . No, sir, I will *not* git no room ready in the middle of the night for no young person."

Fury seized West. "You tiresome woman, get back to bed then if you like. Fielden, put your trousers on and come down with me; I suppose you know where she keeps the sheets? Only, Eliza, please understand that if you won't obey my orders you won't stay in my house."

"Shan't I?" said the Nonconformist, blocking the doorway so that West had only a partial and agitated view of his old batman hastily tucking his shirt into his trousers. "Ho. Well, Mr. Orbery, I dessay I shan't be long out of a plice. Your dear mother'll give me a carrickter if you won't. But if I ad to go to the workouse I'd go, sooner than it shd be said of me that I stood by an eld a candle to the works of darkness."

"Let me come by, old girl," said Fielden rather piteously. He stood six feet in his socks, but he no more dared to walk out of the room in defiance of his wife than a well-bred dog dares to defy the household kitten. Mrs. Fielden did not budge. "*Do* lemme come by," Fielden pleaded in an anxious whisper. "You mustn't cheek the master like that, Lizzie. You know when 'e says a thing 'e means it, an' when 'e wants it done 'e gets it done"—this was meant for an aside, but it was as audible to West as to Eliza, and he was brought so low that he was comforted by it. "Oh well, if you won't you won't, but I'm not goin' to lose a good place for rubbish o' that sort," said Fielden in exasperation. But still he dared not pick his wife up and shift her out of the way. Then West had an inspiration. He turned round and rapped on Annie's door.

"Annie, are you awake?" A rhetorical question—he was only too sure that Annie was wide awake. "Jump up, then, and dress yourself as quickly as you can—if Mrs. Fielden will behave so foolishly——"

"Never," said Mrs. Fielden, "shall it be said of Eliza

Fielden that she let a young gurl go where she wouldn go erself. Annie, you stop where you are. Where is the young person, sir?"

"In the dining-room."

"Lor, Mr. Orbery, you aven't never left er in the room with all my silver?"

West and Fielden remained alone on the upper landing.

Fielden, who had by now got into his trousers and coat, was apologetic and unhappy. Not thus, in the best regiments, did the best servants wait upon the best masters. "I hope you'll overlook Eliza, sir," he faltered. "She means well, but along of her bein' brought up in the country, you see, she's never 'ad no advantages worth speakin' of, so she doesn't reelly know what's what. But 'er 'eart's in the right place, though she does sometimes express herself very low."

"Oh, bother Eliza," said West, running downstairs. "If she expresses herself low to that unfortunate child, out she'll pack and you with her. Why on earth can't you keep her in order?"

But when he reached the dining-room he found that his fears were idle. Never should it be said of Eliza Fielden that she didn't draw a line between her duty to her master—which chiefly was, in his regrettable want of common sense, to protect him against himself—and her duty to her master's guests, for whom she felt no moral responsibility. She was standing near the door when West came in, the model of a polite housekeeper, whom no eccentricities of costume could rob of her native dignity.

"Will you tike any more supper, miss?" West heard her say.—Yes, "miss" to the forlorn atom in the tattered daisy hat: out of doors Mrs. Fielden would have summed her up with a sniff, but indoors under West's protection she was entitled to the correct manner.

"No, thank you," the child spoke timidly; "no, not any more."

"Praps you'd like to go to bed then? If you'll come with me, miss, I'll tike you to your room."

But apparently the correct manner failed to inspire the little stray with confidence. A few hours ago she had suffered severely from one of her own sex, and she may have felt as much afraid of virtue in Vivian Street as of vice in Hatchard's Rents. "I—I think I'd rather not stay," she began, and then, catching sight of West in the doorway, she flew across the room and clasped his arm. Her rose-bud color had all faded and her eyes were dim and wild like the eyes of a shot bird beating out its frightened heart under a rough hand. "O! don't send me away with her; she doesn't look kind. O! let me, let me stay with you! Ye were kind to me!"

West withdrew his arm. He was only a man after all, and it crossed his mind to be glad that no other man was watching him—not Marqueray with his cynic grin, nor even John Fielden. No, nor yet Miss Yarborough—least of all Miss Yarborough.

"Mrs. Fielden is my housekeeper," he answered gently. "You mustn't be afraid of her, because she's going to be very kind to you. If you will go with her, my child, she'll bring you some warm water, and light a fire for you, and tuck you up all cosy and comfortable. You're so tired to-night you don't know what you're saying. Now run away, and don't be fanciful"—West was scarcely thirty, but his accent was fifty-five: "and let me see a bright face in the morning."

"Must I? . . . I want me little boy," said the child.

She came drooping back to the fireside, gathered up her rag doll, and went meekly out with it, cradling it in the old preposterous way against her young breast. West watched her begin to climb the stair. He heard Mrs. Fielden's low, involuntary "Sikes alive!" and on a second inspiration he beckoned her back into the room.

"She's a child ruined, Eliza," he said, bending his clear,

grave eyes on her shrewd and startled face. "Her baby died in the workhouse. Be good to her, will you? to please me. Pay some of the debt for me that men owe her."

He scarcely expected to be understood. An educated man is prone to believe that the uneducated cannot follow his thoughts. But minds are much the same all the world over, though vocabularies differ, and Mrs. Fielden's features worked queerly.

"Lord sikes, wy she's only a biby erself! An as fer you, Mr. Orbery, I always ave said an always shall sye, this world'd be a better plice if—— Don't you worry yerself, I'll look after er. Jest you set down an get yer supper, you aven't ad a bite yet, and I'll come down agine an tell you what's what."

West sat down in his oak chair and leaned his head on his hand. He was dead tired, too tired to feel hungry, but so far as the little stray was concerned he was now at peace. Eliza had a heart, which was precisely the reason why he had kept her for several years in his service, and was likely to continue to keep her there so long as she cared to stay. She had a heart, and West had been given to understand—though he never knew why—that a share of it was devoted to her master. She had a shrewd head, too. Feckless, gentle Annie would have risen at a word, but Annie would have gossiped to the milkman and the butcher boy in the morning. Eliza, her sympathies once touched, would do all that Annie could have done, and would hold her tongue into the bargain and see to it that Annie held hers. The rigors of a Nonconformist conscience are not without their compensations.

West felt this more strongly than ever when Mrs. Fielden came down again nearly an hour later. He had supped, and was sitting in a chair by the fire, smoking a briar pipe, and half asleep. Eliza glided into the room—it was characteristic of her that, though her accent was that of Chatham undefiled, her voice was low and her movements were

neat and quiet—and stood by the table looking down at him with a tempered, a not unkindly severity. “Ave you ad your supper, Mr. Orbery?” she began. “Yes, I see you ave, an you’ve took the leg of the chicking. She ad the liver wing an one side of the breast; I spose you cut it for er. You might’ve took the gizzard wing, though, if you mus give er the liver, but I spose you lef that for me an Fielden.” She shook her head at him, but rather in sorrow than in reproach. “Well, your young lidy’s in bed and sleepin like I dono what. She ain’t arf used to bein wited on. I put er in a bath jes like a biby; a nice ot bath’d do er more good than anything. A buderful white skin she’s got, come to tike er cloes off.”

“You’re a ministering angel, Eliza,” said West, looking at her amusedly. It always struck him afresh as an extraordinary thing that Mrs. Fielden’s austerity of conscience ran in double harness with a rather Rabelaisian freedom of tongue. He had never—nor had Fielden—any idea what she would say next.

“So now you can go to bed yerself an ave a good sleep. What time would you like to be called in the mornin, sir? It’s close on one o’clock aready, an at your age you can do with all the budy sleep you can get.”

“Oh, the usual time, please. Eight o’clock breakfast.” West yawned; the prospect of getting up again in six hours was painful to him. He was not a strong man, and he was habitually overworked by his chief, who, built of steel and whipcord, and forcing the pace to the limit of his own strength, was inclined to get out of patience with his secretaries if they lagged behind him. “But don’t call the child, let her have her sleep out.”

“I’d let you ave your sleep out, too, if you wasn’t that obstinate I know you’d git up to spite me and shive in look-warm water.—And what am I to do with er when she does wike up? Give er er breakfast in ere, I spose; she can’t

ave it in the kitching. She'll be askin all sorts o' questions; she didn't know what she was syin to-night, not no more than if she was drunk, bless er, but she'll ave a lot to sye for erself to-morrer.—Ho, very well, I'll tell er to wite till you comes in. But, Mr. Orbery, whatever am I to do fer er fer cloes? Them rags she's got on are jest abaht fit for the dusbin, they ain't to call clean; she asn't ad no washin done for a fortnight to look at er chemise an——”

West hurriedly suggested that Mrs. Fielden might be kind enough to lend her some undergarments.

“Sikes, she wouldn wear my chemises!” said Eliza frankly. “Reel lice she's got on all er undercloes, lice inches deep; fact it's the only thing abaht er that I don't call respectable. Tore it is, which is why she didn sell em, I expec; she's not the sort to be andy with er needle. But I shouldn reelly care to ask er to wear my things; if you was a lidy, sir, you'd soon see what I mean, if I was to pull up my petticoats an show you the difference——”

West, rather more hurriedly, took a note from his pocket-book and suggested that Mrs. Fielden should nip up to King's Road and remedy all deficiencies.

“Well, if you think it's nice for a young gentleman to be pyin for a young lidy's undercloes——” said Eliza, dissatisfied, but pocketing the note. “I'm sure I dono what the world's comin to nowidys, nor what your dear father n mother'd sy to sich goins on, Mr. Orbery. But you're jest abaht as innercent as a biby yerself.”

“I'm going to bed,” said West, getting up, and overtaken in the middle of the word by an enormous yawn. There were times when Mrs. Fielden made him wish he were Lothario instead of Galahad. “You're a brick, Eliza. Just keep the child quiet to-morrow till I get in, and then I'll have a chat with her and find out, if I can, how on earth she got into the original trouble, and what her friends were doing to let her come to such a pass. I can't bear

to think what might have happened if Mr. Marqueray and I hadn't come to the rescue." He hesitated a moment from one of those scruples of delicacy which are thrown away on the practical mind of a woman of the working classes. "She's—what one calls a lady, you see, Eliza."

"Lidy! oh bless you, yes, she's a lidy," said Eliza cheerfully. "You shd jest've seen the wy she let me unbutton er boots an tike er cloes off. Used to a mide, she is, you can see that as pline as a pikestaff, an never," the last word of admiration in a democratic country, "done a stroke of ard work since she was born. *She* wasn brought up to earn er own livin. An as pretty as a piesher, too, if she was a bit fatter, wich she soon will be if you go givin er my best wings o' chicking. She's mide to be as plump as a little partridge, you can see that, not like arf the lidies is nowidys, jes two bits o' board stuck together——"

West retired. But Eliza followed him upstairs, and on the landing, her voice dropped to that indolent, rustical, diluted Cockney whisper which drawls every vowel and drops or blunts every consonant, she pointed to the spare room door. "Sleepin buderful she was when I lef er, jes like a biby. Still, as we dono nothink abaht er, an she my tike a fancy to be off in an urry, I thought I better jes turn the key on er."

"You've locked her in?"

"Jest in cyse she shd tike a fancy to some o' my silver."

"Eliza, you are intolerable!" said West, really roused at last. "Where is the key of her door?"

"Now, Mr. Orbery, don't you go a temptin Providence! With er nex door to you, and you a young man, for a young man you are though you my be better n mos young men, but what I says is, that key's sifer in my keepin than what it is in yours——"

"Give it to me at once," said West.

He took it away from Mrs. Fielden,—not a whit overawed, and still protesting in a whisper,—unlocked the door of the

spare room, took the key out again because he was sure Mrs. Fielden meant to relock it as soon as his back was turned, slipped it into his pocket, and went into his own chamber to sleep the sleep of the sorely tried man who has asserted his right to be master in his own household.

CHAPTER IV

You speak o' the people
As if you were a god to punish, not
A man of their infirmity.

“GOOD afternoon, sir,” said Marqueray, dropping into a big leathern armchair beside his uncle in the large and sparsely populated smoking-room of Mr. Vere’s favorite club. Mr. Vere grunted “Afternoon” from behind the *Morning Post*. Marqueray crossed one leg over the other, lit a cigar, gave an order to a waiter, and looked round him with the mild interest which a man takes in reviewing old landmarks. Mr. Vere frequented a very small, exclusive, and unsociable club at the south end of Dover Street, where politics were barred, and persons of garrulous tongue and friendly habits were generally blackballed. Marqueray had scraped in, but Aubrey West had suffered, not for loquacity, but because in the opinion of the club as voiced by Robert Vere he was “too d——d amiable.”

Mr. Vere’s large personality occupied two-thirds of a wide window seat. The sash was thrown up behind him, and a mild air came in, bringing the indefinable October scent of London, a mingling of fallen leaves, frost, and smoke, which Marqueray sniffed appreciatively. It was not yet dark; it would have been broad daylight in open country; but a shop or two over the way had begun to light up, and though, between vague clouds, some daylight blue lingered overhead, the five o’clock atmosphere of Piccadilly was beginning to take on a tinge of indigo. There was no one within earshot, and after a few minutes Marqueray spoke again, his soft voice nearly swallowed

up in the continuous din of traffic, which rose and fell like surf on a shingle strand.

"I saw your godson last night, sir. Met him after the debate and walked most of the way home with him."

"Did you?" said Vere uninterested; then, in a concession to politeness, "Have any talk with him?"

"Nothing much." Marqueray smiled to himself: all day long he had caught himself smiling whenever he thought of that idiot, West. "We weren't alone. Marchmont was there. He had been down to the House to listen to Yarborough, like me. Have you ever heard that he is financially concerned in South American politics?"

"Never. Have you any reason to think so?"

Marqueray inclined his head. "West let it out. Mind, Bobby, if he refers to it to you, I wasn't more interested than civility required.—Rather an odd fish, Marchmont: I'm not sure that he won't figure prominently in the next report I have the honor, etc. But that's another story. While we're on it, however, you can't give me any tips about his private life, can you?"

"Marchmont's? The usual scandalous chronicle, I should imagine," said Robert Vere, laying down his paper in some surprise. "Surely you can't want to know whether he pays his tailor's bill? That's not in our line of trade!"

"Er—I crossed his line last night. It's of no consequence, but if you had his dossier it would or might be useful to me in a purely private matter." Marqueray paused to shake the ash from his cigar and to mix the singular combination of liquids which a waiter had just brought to his elbow. "Rather a brute with women, isn't he?"

Mr. Vere's movement of the shoulders expressed his unaffected indifference. "I know no more of him than any one can see with half an eye."

"No? I must tap another source, then. Yes, it's partly

business. Never mind that just now. To come back to West, who is a bird of a different feather: I'm dining with him to-night at his—rooms, is it? Oh, he has a house of his own? H'm! I see. Chelsea, isn't it? Vivian Street—he gave me his card. Yes; it's years since I've seen anything of West, and I never can recollect what relation he is to me, but he seems to be a nice fellow." The tone was a thought too careless, and Vere glanced up, but he could make nothing of Marqueray's healthy red face. Vere knew his nephew very well indeed—they were augurs both, and it was difficult for either of them to deceive the other. But what motive had Marqueray for deceiving his uncle? None, unless it were that he had taken a prejudice against West, or that he was naturally disingenuous. Vere frowned, disliking either alternative. Marqueray sipped from his tumbler and made a wry face. "No ice," he grumbled: "I told him to ice it." He was not going to confess to the quaint, sentimental tenderness that West had inspired in him. "Ice in October, puppy?" growled his uncle. "They'd give it me without asking in any defeated little pub in the States," retorted Marqueray. "Well, you won't get it here so long as I'm on the Kitchen Committee," said Vere. After this friendly interlude Marqueray took up the conversation where he had dropped it. "Very straight, isn't he?—West, I mean. Almost too straight for what he's up against. I was interested in Yarborough's speech last night. Quite able, but not—at a guess—too scrupulous."

"No, Yarborough sticks at nothing."

"How does a fastidious, disinterested chap like West manage to hit it off with him?"

"Aubrey's an odd boy," said Vere musingly. "If you come to that, Yarborough's not precisely commonplace. You call him unscrupulous, but, to do him bare justice,—which is generous of me, for I haven't yet forgiven him for letting me down,—I do not believe he has any personal

motive. It's all play for his side. I don't say he's incorruptible; it would be rash to say that of a man who has risen, more or less, from the ranks. But there isn't much that would tempt him, and so far as I know he never has swallowed a bribe. He's middling rich, independent of office; he's refused a peerage. He's not much struck on his son, I fancy. A beautiful, quaint creature, Selwyn, all stammer and paintbrush, but no use to Yarborough. He prefers his daughter."

"I don't remember much about her, but I'm going on there to a dance to-night, so I shall renew my acquaintance. However, she isn't important, is she?"

"Possibly not from your point of view," said Vere rather dryly. "But she's very useful to Yarborough. Runs his house for him, gives his dinners, looks after his staff, and—soothes his secretary's feelings, I fancy, when Yarborough raises a dust, as does happen periodically. Aubrey is not strong, you know, and weakness of any sort infuriates Yarborough. His daughter smooths things over: no, Aubrey never said so, but before last May, when I used to go to the house, I had a glimpse now and then of the way things went. I was there one night in April when Aubrey as nearly as possible fainted at dinner. Selwyn had to take him out of the room. Very awkward. Naturally Yarborough was annoyed. One doesn't pay one's secretary to faint into his soup. Still, after all the boy couldn't help it, and Yarborough certainly does work his staff without mercy. It was in the thick of the row over the Naval Estimates, and Aubrey owed to me afterwards that he had been doing twelve or fourteen hours a day with rack-ing neuralgia. At all events, one could see that Yarborough was annoyed, and I was struck by the way Miss Val tackled him. She turned him round her finger, that young lady. She certainly made things easier for Aubrey. Oh no, there's nothing between them, so far as I can see: thank Heaven, Aubrey isn't given to running after women. Be-

sides, as you say, from that point of view Miss Val is negligible."

"Is there any other point of view?" murmured Marqueray. He was fully half sincere; for him Valentine Yarborough counted low in the great game of life if, as his memory dimly intimated, she was not a pretty woman, nor versed in those arts of attraction which redress the balance for the plain. "I wish I weren't so much out of England. It's a condition of the game, of course, but it's a handicap. I find myself periodically thrown among these men and women of whom I know scarcely anything except by hearsay, and expected to pick up in a fortnight all those oddments of personal detail which it takes a lifetime to assimilate. It was a thousand pities you threw up your hand, sir. You could have stayed if you had liked. Why didn't you?"

"I was bored," said Vere briefly.

Circumstances had altered very much since Marqueray's last lengthy stay in town, a little over two years ago. At that date Robert Vere was holding a high post in the Foreign Office, one of those posts in which an immense amount of solid and permanent work is done, though the general public hear little of them. Rumor said that next time there was a shuffling of the Cabinet he would step from influential obscurity into the daylight of a portfolio. The shuffling took place, but instead of becoming Foreign Secretary, Vere threw up his post and retired into private life, leaving Yarborough to fill his empty shoes.

Why? All the well-informed gentlemen who live by knowing why had an answer at their fingertips. A high-spirited, hot-tempered man, born and bred in the prepossessions of the land-owning class, after growing year by year more and more uncomfortable as the balance of the Ministry dipped ever deeper on the democratic side, Vere had at length found himself unable to serve any longer in what was virtually a Labor Cabinet. Friction, that was

it—personal friction: unlucky for Vere, unlucky for the country, since Vere was a capable, honest man: but it was Vere's fault and Vere's alone. Why couldn't he put his feelings in his pocket? George Mallinson at the Treasury was known to have no sympathy with the Prime Minister's wildcat schemes, but he was sticking to his post in the avowed intention of acting as a drag on the wheel. If all the moderate men resigned as soon as there was any personal friction, what would become of the party? All that came of Vere's action was that he made a present of his job to the other wing. The Socialist element were grateful to Vere, the old Conservatives and moderate Liberals were all very angry with him. A high-minded man, but an egoist—so said the Lobby and the clubs: petulant, touchy, hard to work with.

This was the version commonly given and accepted, but a handful of men—including Vere and his nephew, Yarborough and Yarborough's confidential secretary, and one or two other Ministerial chiefs—knew that it went wide of the truth. Vere had been forced out of office against his will. In the teeth of slights, he had stuck to his post till it became untenable. When the war dragged to an end, leaving the Government up to their necks in debt and pledged to costly schemes of reconstruction, the accepted general policy of all parties was peace at any price, and the motto of men who had to get money for social reform was inevitably, as of old, "Starve the services." The wheel was come full circle. They could scarcely help themselves: the boldest turned coward before the prospect of another war: those who had stuck to their guns in the dark days when all seemed lost fell back shuddering and confessed that they had not nerve enough left to face it all over again. And yet, till lapse of years should make it clear that the League of Nations was going to do what no league has ever yet done, it seemed to Vere and men like Vere that we must all stagger on under our horrible bur-

den of competitive armament, or face extinction. As Lord Clare said in the House while fighting to carry his Naval Estimates, we were literally between the devil and the deep sea, and it was not possible for statesmen of wide vision to reply, as did an Irish member, "Then we'll throw the deep sea overboard." Lord Clare threatened to resign if his Estimates were cut down, and Vere, in a private interview with the Prime Minister, took his stand by Clare. They were cut down, Clare went at once, and Vere on a side issue three weeks later. He shrugged his shoulders and held his tongue. He could if he would have led a split in the party, but the tradition of loyalty to his side—the public school spirit, for good or evil—was strong in him, and it was his considered opinion that, if whitewash occasionally did harm, personal wrangles and "caves" never did any good. Vere detested mischief makers. He had never written to the *Times* in his life.

In truth, Vere had always been contemptuous of public opinion. Born out of due time, he had no faith in what he called "the proletariat," and in the history of the war he read only their failures, their short sight, their sloth which time and again paralyzed the nation's arm when she most needed vigor. For their slow growth in political thought, and for the desperate generosity of those millions who, with little to give, gave all they had, turning from plow or factory bench to take the risk of death in the mud flats of Flanders, or of survival—a long, dreary, unheroic survival—in poverty and broken health, Vere had no eye. Driven from office, he laid the blame not on his party leaders but on the fatal pressure behind them. Yet the last twenty years ought to have shown him that the English nation will respect and will follow to the death a wise man who is bold enough to tell it unwelcome truth.

The one man Vere did blame was Riseley Yarborough, who had stepped into those vacant shoes. Vere was not

sensitive and did not care a rap what people said of him, but, though he scoffed at the gossip of the Lobby and the clubs, he pulled a wry face when he heard that Yarborough was to rise by his fall. It was not a case of "forgetting Goschen." They had been personal friends, they had argued it out together, and Vere knew that Yarborough saw danger ahead as clearly as he did himself. But Yarborough, more supple and accommodating, was content, it seemed, to pocket his principles till the situation could be forced without personal risk. Why not? So many men, so many minds. Yet—they had been close friends, and it was all touch and go. Had Yarborough backed Vere as gallantly as Vere backed Clare, Vere was convinced in his heart that the Prime Minister would have given in. But Yarborough had not backed Vere. He had cut the ground from under Vere's feet by accepting the Foreign Office, for which it would have been difficult to find a third candidate. Vere growled to himself that it was a dirty trick. Yarborough had let him down. In public Vere was as loyal to Yarborough as to the Premier, but in his heart he felt very sore. The old friendship was broken off—by tacit consent, for Yarborough made no overtures: and this, too, Vere resented. Gossip, observing the breach, put it down to jealousy, and so did Vere a last and worst injustice, for in his generous heart there was no room for a petty grudge. He missed his friend. But a stab in the back is unpardonable, and though he grieved over Yarborough's bad faith, he was not going to condone it.

No one regretted the change more than Marqueray, who, living mainly out of England, was obliged to take most of his political ideas from his uncle ready-made and second-hand. Indeed, Vere had influenced Marqueray all his life more than either of them knew, and Marqueray's sympathies were unconsciously colored to some extent by Vere's feudal humor. Marqueray had been working too hard to

do much investigation for himself. But now Vere's practical failure set him wondering whether there was anything wrong with Vere's philosophy.

He drew in his legs and sat frowning thoughtfully at the strong, bleached head which was turned away from him against the blue dusk of Dover Street. There was enough likeness between the two men to serve Marqueray as credentials when he had to introduce himself as Vere's nephew, but Vere was better looking and in a more refined, intellectual way: a big man of sixty odd, gray-haired and blue-eyed, his great breadth of shoulder bent and hollow, his features worn and blanched, his arched eyebrow and delicate lip giving him an expression of fastidious melancholy. Marqueray, the taller by an inch or so and the younger by thirty years, possessed a strikingly handsome profile, strong, clear-cut, and classically regular, but when he turned his full face it was almost ugly in its well-fed animal vigor: red-haired, red-skinned, blue-eyed, a trifle under-shot, and marked by no lines of individuality except an easy good humor. In his time Vere, too, had been a hunter, but that time was long gone by. Marqueray was a hunter still. The one smelt of Piccadilly, the other retained, even in Bond Street dress and amid the seclusion of Vere's highly conventional club, some breath of the wild woods. Marqueray habitually sat as still as a statue. But this repose was not—it rarely is—the sign of a lymphatic temperament. He was and looked as if he were always ready to act on the spur of the moment. Action, however, had become much more difficult now that Vere was no longer in office to serve as a medium of communication, and Marqueray began to wonder if a philosophy could be sound which crippled a fighting force like Vere while his own party were in power.

"I don't know that I understand West," Marqueray said presently. "And you're not so illuminating as you usually are, sir. Personal feeling counts, no doubt! But I

wish you would tell me how to get hold of him. He's not a hunting, shooting, sporting man. Yet not of the doctrinaire type, either: not so much of the bookworm as you are yourself, I fancy. But he must have some hobby, some recreation?"

"Hasn't much time. Yarborough gets a lot of work out of him."

"But what does he do with his evenings?"

"Sees his friends," said Vere with a sudden chuckle.

"Is he well off?"

"Well enough, for a bachelor: over-rented, of course, as I always tell him, but he likes a house of his own, and he can afford it because he hasn't any other expensive tastes."

"You're backing him, aren't you?" said Marqueray with some deliberation. The answer also was deliberate.

"I make him an allowance of £400 a year. Why the devil do you want to know?"

"Why don't you put him up for Parliament?"

"I've thought of doing it. Probably I shall do it some day. He's down in my will for every penny I can leave away from you and Herold. Now, then."

"All right, all right," said Marqueray peaceably. "I don't want it, I've plenty of my own. So West's dependent on you, is he? I thought I remembered something of the sort. Rather an uncomfortable position, seeing he's next to no relation of yours: at least I should find it a drag—perhaps West doesn't."

"I do not think so," said Vere, smiling to himself. "If you were dependent on me, Dan, I should probably let you know it now and then. But I never have any inclination to let Aubrey know it. Mind, not a syllable about this to Aubrey. What I say about him is said in confidence. Give me your word, please, not to repeat it." Marqueray smiled rather scornfully. "Oh! it's not your discretion I mistrust," said Vere dryly. "It's your manners, sir."

"I shan't speak of it," said Marqueray briefly.

He drew himself to his feet and walked away, feeling for the moment a little out of humor with his uncle, not to say hurt. As if it were likely—! The blood burned under his dark skin. Manners, quotha! Vere ought to have known better. For the moment, Marqueray was not impartial enough to reflect that Vere's attitude to him was the counterpart of his own attitude to Vere—frank and open on any point of business, but secretive in personal relations. And yet Marqueray was very fond of Robert Vere, very proud of him; there was no bar between them except the habit of mutual reserve.

Marqueray rented an expensive flat behind Whitehall. He drove thither after leaving the frankly eccentric Tacenda Club, and went to his bedroom to change into evening clothes. His windows overlooked the river, and in the intervals of bathing and dressing his eyes traveled not infrequently over the sullen stretches of the Thames, olive-colored under an evening haze. Behind the towers of Westminster a yellow rift or two of sunset broke through the mournful dimness of October. Along the river boulevard, after a night of frost, dead leaves had been dropping all day, loosening themselves from their stalks without a wind. A string of barges were nosing their way upstream, the turbid water slapping under their keels or spurting up between stern and bow in a cocoa-colored froth. What a river to drown in! Marqueray, an imaginative man, was seized by the vision of a young girl's slender body rolling over and over in that somber flood, in and out of the shipping in the Pool.

Marqueray had spent most of his day in the City pursuing investigations which would have made Marchmont very uncomfortable if he had known anything about them. The incident of Chelsea Bridge had only whetted his natural hunter's zest; he was permanently curious about the private lives of millionaires who held Peruvian stock; his

mind was a sensitive medium perpetually registering impressions, and what he had once, as he said, assimilated was never forgotten. It went into its pigeon-hole ready for use at a moment's warning twenty years later. Marqueray was a highly organized and delicate intellectual machine; that the physical machine was in correspondence appeared in the course of his toilet. Stripped from his bath, glowing from the dash of cold water, he stood up on the bare floor and went rapidly through a long and complicated series of Japanese physical evolutions, the fruit of age-long study of the body's structure. On a shooting expedition in Montenegro or Peru it was easy for him to keep his powerful frame in order; at home in London, in quarters where it amused him to gratify a vein of luxury, he was afraid of getting fat, and he trained like a race-horse morning and evening, suppling every muscle and sweating out of himself any extra weight which indolence and good food put on his bones. Peptonized exercise appealed to his taste for economy in time. It was his boast that he could take more out of himself in half an hour than the unscientific man in the course of a round of golf. This was no exaggeration, for when his half-hour was up he was, for the time being, absolutely exhausted, and he threw himself down on his bed—a narrow camp bedstead: Marqueray remained a Spartan in his personal habits—and lay there for ten minutes, breathing deep and evenly in absolute quiescence, before he returned for a final douche and then finished dressing.

He was due in Chelsea at any time between seven o'clock and eight-thirty, and before leaving Whitehall Court he passed into the adjoining sitting-room and spent half an hour writing at a tall Sheraton bureau fitted with a Yale lock. Marqueray's mail was extensive and cosmopolitan, and he dealt with it, as he did with most departments of life, in a swift, businesslike fashion. Going out, he gave a sheaf of letters to his servant—some of them mere social

notes, others to English financial firms, one or two to Continental addresses, the last to the English manager of a Peruvian copper mine. Banks murmured, "Thank you, sir," and took them immediately to the post. In early days a natural thirst for information had led him to open some of Marqueray's correspondence by the simple device of holding the flap of the envelope in the steam of a kettle; but as Marqueray never wrote to ladies, Banks was now a most trustworthy messenger. Curiosity was damped by Marqueray's bald prose style and absorption in trading detail.

It was between a quarter and twenty past seven when Marqueray rang West's bell and was received by Annie in the gray dress and white winged cap which West liked and Mrs. Fielden couldn't endure. Annie took Marqueray into the study and said that Mr. West would be down in five minutes if Mr. Marqueray would excuse him. Marqueray remained in the chair she offered him, but he made good use of his eyes, though West's study was a dull field of observation. It was a large room, running the length of the house, from the Georgian bay in front to an open French window by the fireplace, overlooking Fielden's dark grass plot; beyond a low wall rose the waving branches of a riverside square, and beyond those again a night sky, vague and profound, Orion's pearly girdle and the fiery spark of Mars now shining and now obscured. Marqueray approved of West's big leathern armchairs and of a rose-colored coke fire stacked half way up the chimney, but the rest of the furniture disappointed him, for it drew blank as far as evidence of character went, unless one could infer from his multitude of portraits that West was fond of his friends and family. Marqueray rather liked one of these, in which he recognized a painting of Colonel Wynn-West in the pre-war full dress of a Hussar regiment: a handsome, gallant man with melancholy eyes and delicate hand on hilt. But the bookshelves full of calf-bound Eng-

lish classics, Dickens, Thackeray, the Waverley novels, eighteenth century essayists, nineteenth century philosophers, had an irritating effect on Marquera's nerves. They made him feel restless with their Victorian moralities and traditions.

But West came in soon after, smiling and a little apologetic for the lateness which he had not been able to avoid, and in some inexplicable way Marquera's restlessness abated on his cousin's entrance. His tension of mind and body relaxed, and he threw one leg over the other and settled himself down in his rocking-chair between glowing hearth and dusky window in a deliberate yielding to satisfaction. Yes, he liked West: he had not come to Vivian Street because he liked West: he would have come in any case, even if he had felt the same inclination to hold West under water for twenty minutes, for the general good of humanity, as Lord Marchmont inspired in him: but it would have been a far less welcome job.

Marquera stared at West for a minute or two in a vague silence, much as he might have watched a favorite dog which he was going to put through its tricks. The simile is not to be taken as implying an attitude of condescension, but merely that he expected West to soothe and amuse him. He liked the look of West and the careless trimness of his evening clothes, well-cut and well-worn. Marquera himself was modish in his dress. In a year when fashion gave men more scope than they enjoyed before the war, it amused him, fresh from Andean snows, to play the exquisite in dark blue and to stick a big, unflawed sapphire in the bosom of his fine cambrie shirt. But he would have been disappointed if West had not kept his careless middle way between the dandy and the sloven. Yes, he liked West. . . . But for all that the form of his first remark surprised him almost as much as it surprised West—"Well, and what have you been doing with yourself all day, Aubrey?"

CHAPTER V

"What stature is she of?"

"Just as high as my heart."

WEST, who was standing before Marqueray with a box of cigars in his hand, started slightly. Vere had once said to him, "Dan never does anything without an object," and the phrase had stuck and rankled in his memory. So far as he knew, Marqueray was a rich and idle sportsman; if he was not that, or not only that, he was a mystery, and West didn't like mysteries. West had many friends, but he had never dreamed of reckoning Marqueray among them—"Too rapid for me," he would have said. However, there could be no mystery here, and certainly Marqueray's manner was rather charming when he smiled with his eyes as well as with his lips. He had grown more simple than West remembered him. Well: if he came to Vivian Street he was welcome, and if he made advances West would meet him—not quite half way.

"Much the same as usual," said West, sitting down in the opposite chair when he had ministered to his guest. "I don't get much time for running into mischief; Yarborough keeps me at it pretty hard."

"Your chief? I'm going on to their dance to-night. I thought you were safe to be coming, too—or isn't that one of your duties?"

"Hence this grandeur," West murmured with a sly glance at the sapphire. "No, I'm not much of a dancing man, and Mr. Yarborough is good enough to let me go my own way. I've a standing invitation, but I don't often put in an appearance."

"Tired of it, are you?"

"Oh no, not a bit; I often wish I had more time for that sort of thing. But I can't stand the late hours. Somehow, when I've done my day's work, I never seem to have much energy to spare."

"You never were too strong. Vere has been telling tales. What's all this I hear about your fainting, Aubrey?"

"What rubbish!" West exclaimed. "Did Mr. Vere tell you that? Really, I wish he would mind his own business!"

"And I mine—is that it? But I'm not sure that I shan't make it my business. I don't like to see you looking so fagged, and people don't faint for nothing. I suppose your heart has been going wrong again. I recollect when we were in the ranks you were always trying to dodge the M.O."

"And I recollect, Marqueray, you were good enough to tell me I was always trying to dodge the unpleasant fatigues."

"Did I? What a rotten shame! And it's rankled all these years, has it?"

West's temper was quick, but he had the grace to be sorry when he lost it. "You don't know," he said apologetically, "how sick one gets of that sort of chaff. Sometimes I think I shouldn't mind so much if there were anything organically wrong with me! But there isn't, and when you can't give any decent excuse for creaking up, it makes you feel such a fool."

"And so you are, if you let Yarborough overwork you. I can't think," said Marqueray with his decisive clearness of manner, "how you can stand it. Everlasting desk work and head work, or so I suppose: conciliating Jacks in office, verifying references, fending off the crank with a grievance, standing round to hand things when he's going to make a speech—isn't that the sort of thing a Minister's private secretary has to do? I can't imagine a duller life

even if you had the strength for it. And what's the good of it? You haven't even the satisfaction of knowing it'll all go down to your own account. It won't. You're not in the running."

"The butterfly upon the road," West replied sententiously, "doesn't understand the solid moral satisfaction which the toad derives from going under the harrow. Yarborough's a considerate harrow on the whole, and I'm deeply interested in watching his progress. It will use up a large number of toads."

"Meaning me by the butterfly? Yes, I suppose the life of a sportsman pure and simple would strike you as waste of time. But is it? is it? A man once told me that my ambition was to effect the maximum of destruction with the maximum of effort. He said that it is less expensive and exhausting to shoot fifty brace of pheasants than one lion, and that the dead pheasants are worth more than the dead lion. I said he missed the mark entirely, and that my ambition was to develop my own physical and mental resources by pitting them against a brute which is my superior in nine points out of ten, and not to drug them by indiscriminate slaughter. But *you're* not developing anything, not even your brains."

"Go it!" said West, not at all annoyed now and very much amused. He was not sensitive except about his health. "Tell me some more things like that; I love them."

"Why don't you go in for politics on your own?"

"Forgive me, but you've been so busy shooting lions that you haven't quite grasped the way these things do themselves nowadays. A man can't go in for politics on his own unless he has money to burn. I should love to see Hope's face if I went and asked him to find me a seat. I don't say he wouldn't do it. He might back me for a sporting event if he thought it would be worth his while. But if I did that, I couldn't call my soul my own. As Mr. Yarborough's secretary I feel, on the whole, fairly in-

dependent. I don't mind selling him my work: but I do draw the line at selling Hope my opinions."

"H'm. But what do you get out of it?"

"The satisfaction of seeing things decently done. Yarborough, you know, was never one of the old gang. He hates obstructionists and reactionaries. He believes in the gentle art of governing, and so do I, but most of the other men don't. Even when they're honest, they're so, so ineffective somehow. They take office in a democracy, yet they have no faith in the working classes, and they bring forward measures they only half believe in, and drop them at the first hint of a block. They live in terror of the Trade Unions. But Yarborough's a born fighter, and he has a passion for getting things done. When I work under him, I feel that I'm a cog in a big and efficient machine. No, there's no honor and glory, but I'm not out for honor and glory. They will never come my way."

"Only want to be useful, is that it? *Sed miles, sed pro patria*. . . . Noble of you, very."

"Did I lay myself open to that?" said West with his good-humored smile. "Not quite, because I don't for one moment pretend that I shouldn't like to have a shot at the House if I could afford it. Sour grapes! But, I say, I never meant to bore you with all this; you're not a bit interested in politics, are you?"

"Not a bit," said Marqueray, sinking a little deeper in his chair till his crossed knees were nearly on a level with his chin. "Not I; I know nothing whatever about them. But I'm interested in life itself. I go to the jungle: what does it give me? War to the knife, or to speak more accurately, war to the cordite rifle. Not but what one occasionally finds oneself in a tight corner where *this*"—the downward thrust of his hand was vividly pictorial of the rip of steel through flesh—"is the only way out. Anyhow it's war. Then I come back to town and find much the same sort of thing going on with the same sort of weapons.

There's been some knifework done while I've been in Peru. Your beloved Yarborough has put it between the ribs of our old friend Vere. No, don't try to make his apology; his back is broad enough to bear his own burden. Uncle Robert must have been hard hit because even to me—and he's generally pretty frank with me—he pretended that he didn't care a dash. You call Yarborough a born fighter, but Vere was his pal, and he let him down."

"Mr. Yarborough doesn't always see eye to eye with Mr. Vere." West hesitated, afraid of slipping into indiscretion. "He felt bound to take his own line. But he was wretched over it. When Mr. Vere cools down, I should like to bring them together."

"You won't do it. Vere will never forgive treachery." West fidgeted in silence. "I wonder," Marqueray finished in his soft voice, never softer than when he was allowing himself to take a freedom, "if you realize what an odd position yours is, as Vere's godson and friend, and Yarborough's employee."

This time West's silence became emphatic, and he examined the tips of his joined fingers as if he found them more interesting than Marqueray. He was not precisely offended: for one thing, Marqueray was evidently sincere, and he was never offended by sincerity, and secondly, the elder man—his cousin, after all—had only said what his own conscience had been saying to him for a long while. But he was amused, and he found it difficult to answer, for he was guiltless; but the motives which kept him in Yarborough's service were not likely to carry weight with Marqueray.

"Think it over," said Marqueray. "You ought to be on your own, Aubrey." He got up and stood with his back to the hearth, pulling up his coat tails to warm his legs at West's cheerful fire. "You're too much inclined to stick where you are. Come out of it. I've half a mind to pull you out." West felt some mild surprise, but was too placid

to express it. "That reminds me, did you drop your little friend a line as you said you would?"

"Drop a line——?"

"To damn him for his impudence."

"Oh, ah! Yes, I wrote Marchmont a stiff note and got Mr. Yarborough to initial it."

"Did you? How prudent!" Amusement seemed to grow on Marqueray, but its quality was a trifle sardonic. "Ha ha! did you really? Lord, how like an Englishman! Don't you know what you ought to have done? . . . Led him on a bit, of course: played your fish till you got him to commit himself. Then you could have found out what he was after. Oh, Aubrey, what a waste of an opportunity! Why didn't I put you up to it last night?"

West looked up quietly. "I should have done exactly the same in any case. I'm not a detective, Marqueray."

"Hallo! . . . After that I'll have another cigar," said Marqueray.

He smoked for the better part of five minutes in a silence which West did not try to break. A joke is a joke: but Marqueray, under his jesting manner, had been in earnest: of that West was certain, and he did not like it, and did not much care whether Marqueray took offense or no. Marqueray, however, did not take offense. He roused himself and turned round, smiling into West's eyes—"Sorry," he said.

"Oh, so am I!" West was disarmed and contrite.

"No, you aren't. And, yes, I see what you mean: it would never have struck me like that, but it's pretty.—Is it permitted to ask what has become of that unfortunate little girl of Marchmont's?"

West hailed with relief this diversion to a safer theme. "The unfortunate little girl, as you call her, is at this moment fortifying herself to come down and talk to me when I ring for her. I haven't seen her since my house-keeper carried her off last night, but I hear she's quite a

different creature to-day. She fell asleep before her head was on the pillow and never woke till three in the afternoon. I came in for lunch, but I wasn't going to have her disturbed, and this evening I didn't get back till twenty minutes before you turned up. But I must interview her some time to-night, I suppose."

"Rather an embarrassing addition to a bachelor establishment," said Marqueray grinning.

"Very much so. I don't know what on earth to do with her," West answered frankly. "I'd take her up to Cambridge and drop her into my sister's lap if it weren't that—if—if other family considerations didn't stand in the way." He gave a rather rueful glance at the Hussar portrait. "To tell you the truth, no one except Caroline would believe the tale. My father is too Low a Churchman to have any faith in human nature."

"Not in yours?"

"Least of all in mine. So I can't go to Caroline, and there's no other woman that I know well enough to come on for help in a case like this, except one, and I didn't get a chance of talking to her to-day. My chief's daughter. Have you ever seen her? You will to-night. Well, she's sure to be on some committee or other that would be helpful. I suppose it's a case for a committee. I don't much like committees."

"Have her down now, and let's hear what she has to say for herself." West looked not only doubtful but definitely unwilling. "I'm in it with you," said Marqueray, letting down his coat tails and tossing away his cigar. "I really should like to have another look at her. You're not a Low Churchman, are you?" He stared down into West's eyes, and West met him as steadily—a long, searching glance. Marqueray smiled contemptuously.

"Oh, it's not that," said West. "It isn't that I don't trust your ultimate decency, Marqueray. For that matter, what's the odds between you and me and any other fellow?"

It is a woman's job, and you and I are equally out of it."

"No, we aren't," said Marqueray, flicking a grain of ash from his sleeve. "I know that, if Colonel Wynn-West doesn't. What cynic says there are only two classes of men, those who kiss and tell and those who kiss and don't tell? There is a third one, and you are of it, but I'm not, nor will I pretend to wish I were. Not that I'm much interested in women as women, but what is one to do when one isn't shooting? One must while away the time somehow. The worst of it is I get sick of them in half no time. Three months was my maximum."

"Why on earth are you telling me this?"

"Do you mind?"

"Yes, I do, I wish you wouldn't," said West impatiently. "I don't thrust my own convictions on you——"

"No, why don't you? I'm open to new ideas. That's why I came here."

"Is that a challenge? Then I wonder what you think is to become of a wretched girl when her three months are over——"

"Oh, that was all right," Marqueray explained in good faith. "She was married."

West laid his head back and laughed. In the teeth of Marqueray's inveterate simplicity he could not keep a sober face. But he was sad at heart. After all, Marqueray had never had any guide but Juvenal and Horace and his school chapels and the Pagan code of Robert Vere—excellent influences all for the formation of one's civic character, but useless when one had to face the graver personal problem of self-restraint. It was his simplicity that endeared him to West, who had never dreamt of finding that boyish trait under Marqueray's tropic sunburn and ironical eyes. In what an extraordinary way he was behaving! Apparently he had come to Vivian Street bent on confession, and West, on whom the code of the Church Militant was as binding as any military oath, dared not quit his post,

though he was a sensitive, shy man, and very much afraid that Marqueray would turn round and jeer at him for his pains. He answered mildly, concealing the effort of moral courage that wrenched at him like a physical strain, "Well, if you want my point of view, that doesn't make it any better. Apart from the sin against divine law, which I gather you don't believe in,—I do,—there's the breach of social order and the wrong done to another man."

"Oh, I can't be bothered with husbands," said Marqueray laughing. His smile faded: he pulled a rose out of a bowl on the mantelpiece and began to strip it petal by petal in his strong, nervous hands. West watched the work of destruction with the dismay of a flower lover but dared not remonstrate. "How difficult it is to be sincere! As a matter of fact I was rather sorry for him, poor chap. He knew what was going on, but he was helpless. He didn't want to divorce her because of the children, and he couldn't pitch into me for obvious reasons. He was rather frail . . . I suppose, if you come to that, it was because of him that I cleared out. She was one of the most beautiful women in Moscow. But I couldn't stand her manner to me before him."

"You have chivalry, then," said West, "but absolutely no religious or moral code."

"No religious code, if you like. Has any one?" Marqueray tossed the stripped stalk into the fire. "But not absolutely no moral code, though it doesn't square with the ten commandments. I refuse to be classed with our friend March. I never deceived a woman in my life, and I never did any harm to a young girl."

"My roses, my roses!" cried West——

"What is it?"

"Break my china if you like, there's a good fellow, but I can't stand watching you fiddle with those unfortunate flowers!"

Marqueray stared absently at a second bud which he had

taken from the bowl, and which now hung dead in his hand, the stem broken. West got up and took it from him and threw it in the fire.

"The danger of your sort of code," he said under his breath, "is that one occasionally breaks a bud without knowing it."

"No, no, I never have," said Marqueray. "Good God, no!" He rallied, shaking off the impression which West's manner had made on some secret vein of fatalism. "No, I never have done it, and I never shall. I give a wide berth to innocence. But occasionally, when a thing is for sale, I buy. So now you know the worst, and you can try your hand at reforming me, if you like. I'm getting rather sick of myself. One does, when one's hair starts going gray. Mine hasn't yet,"—he passed his hand over its thick, bright, red-brown waves,—"but I dare say it soon will. Reform and Tatcho seem to go together. Now will you have the kid down or no?"

"Like a shot, if that were all, you old ass," West answered rather unexpectedly. "But it really isn't that, it never was. . . ."

"What is it then?—But I know what it is; you think she'll be less embarrassed with one of us alone, and that I shall terrify her. But she didn't seem to mind me last night; in fact for a kid of her age she was pretty cool. She did all the terrifying. Fetch her down, Aubrey. I'm interested in the case, and if she's to be fished out of the gutter I'll lend a hand." West still hesitated. "Give you my word, if she doesn't like the look of me, if you signal to me to go, I'll go."

West was not at ease, but he yielded, because he had complete faith in what he called his cousin's decency. After all, if Marqueray cared to do a kind action, why throw difficulties in his way?

Marqueray pushed his chair well back into the dusk of the window, away from the glowing hearth and the paler

gleam of silver candlesticks, and sat, chin on hand, directing curious eyes towards the door. Curious, because he was wondering what the stray would be like when she was washed and brushed. It was plain that West would not let her appear in her native rags. Perhaps if Marqueray had drawn an imaginary portrait it would have revealed a thin, apathetic child of sixteen in the neat black and white of a parlormaid.

But the little creature who presently came in was so changed from her overnight self that neither West nor Marqueray would have known her in the street. She was attired in a dress of gray delaine, its fine folds gathered in at her waist under a gray silk sash: a ready-made dress, but soft in shape and color, and worn with the grace that is the natural ornament of a pure and pliant frame. Her richly curling dark hair was parted and combed up, not a thread astray, to a high coronet which set in relief the dignity of her small head and the Italian oval of her face. She had revived from her fatigue with the rapidity of the very young: rose-bloom was on her cheek again, and the promise of a dimple: and her eyes, those wistful, dark-blue Irish eyes of hers under their thick, curling lashes, traveled from West to Marqueray with an irresistible coaxing smile as she gave her hand to first one and then the other of her strangely constituted protectors.

"Mr. West, is it? and Mr. Marqueray," she said with the faintest evanescent hint of an Irish brogue, just enough to warm her voice and give it the sweetness of a caress. "I've so wanted all day to see you and thank you."

Marqueray when he had clasped that small hand dropped back into the shadow. It was not his cue to speak. But he could scarcely take his eyes from her face.

Aubrey felt inclined to laugh. A bachelor of eight and twenty, it tickled his sense of humor to find that his ward was exceedingly pretty and of marriageable age. "Thank Heaven Val isn't fanciful," he said to himself, and then

he sighed, reminding himself that he had no right to call his chief's daughter Val even in the privacy of his own thought. . . . And so back to duty, after one of those journeys of the imagination that wander through eternity between two beats of a man's heart. How quaint the child was in her composure! She let him put her into his own chair, and there she sat leaning her lovely head on her arm, and demurely folding her ankles on the low stone fender, scarcely more troubled by her strange situation than a stray kitten which licks the hand that gives it milk and a place at the hearth.

"I was so tired, so very, very tired," she said, "I never woke till nearly tea time. Wasn't it awful? And then ye were out. But Mrs. Fielden did everything for me. She is a lamb. I'll never be able to thank her or you. But that's not saying I don't owe you very differently from her—you and Mr. Marqueray. I'd have died if it wasn't for you."

"Heaven forbid," said West gently. "Some one else would have found you if we hadn't. I can't think how it was no one found you before. How long had you been sitting there?"

She shook her head. "I don't remember two things about it. I was so tired and so hungry and miserable, 'tis all gone away into like a dream. I don't even know where I was when you found me."

"You were sitting on a bench on Chelsea Bridge, five or ten minutes' walk from here."

"I forget." She screwed her eyes up. "No, now I can see a river flowing, flowing away somewhere underneath a bridge. And I remember thinking I'd have to tumble in because there was nothing else for me to do. But that's all gone away now, I never did really want to drown meself—in the Thames, too, so muddy: I wouldn't mind so much in the sea or a lake, Lago di Garda or Brienz, so blue and quiet. But I don't want to drown meself anywhere now.

It makes an immense difference when ye've had a good dinner."

"Yes," West agreed gravely, "there's nothing, nothing in life makes so much difference as a good dinner."

" 'Twas a great sin of me to think of it at all. But I was frightened: there was a face frightened me. . . ." Marqueray glanced up, but West shook his head. If she had no clear memory of the interlude of Marchmont, what purpose was to be served by reminding her of it? . . . "But that was fancy; it can't have been real. Ye do get fancies when you're very, very tired. And, oh dear, such a Molly-coming-back-from-the-Fair as I must have looked like! I can't think how ye could take me home with you."

"Why, my child, I couldn't leave you there. I could see you were worn out and didn't know where to go."

"I ought to have gone to the workhouse. But I have very unpleasant associations with workhouses." She swept up her long eyelashes to look from West to Marqueray with a haughtily delicate and meek defiance. "Ye see, me little boy was born in the workhouse, and he died when he was only three days old. That was very painful for me."

"Very," said West. He dared not look at Marqueray. Oh, these broken rosebuds!

"I forgot if I told ye this last night. I was very foolish, I'm afraid." She blushed, and West divined that she was thinking of the silk petticoat. " 'Tisn't so long since me little boy was born, and I'm not too strong yet. But I had to say it again for you and Mr. Marqueray to hear, because ye've both been very kind to me, and before ye do any more I want you to understand the way it is with me, that I'm what they call a fallen woman."

Marqueray got up and touched West's arm. "Here, I'd better get out of this," he murmured.

"No, stay," said West.

The same impression of poignant, of irremediable sad-

ness which drove Marqueray from the room made West willing to let him stay.

"But I haven't done anything wrong except the once," pursued the inexorable child's voice. "I think—I don't quite understand—but I think Mrs. Carter, me landlady, meant me to do wrong again. Ye know I don't understand, I'm not so very old." Her eyes lingered on Marqueray, as if she were pleading with a harsher judge than Aubrey West. "Truly I don't even see how—one could . . . but if one can, I dare say ye know all about it; I want you to believe that I never did." Ruthless honesty wrung a postscript out of her. "I—I think I would have, last night, if I'd known the way. I'd have gone anywhere with any one to get warm. 'Twas very wicked of me. But ye looked after me instead,—you and Mr. West,—and so the Blessed Virgin helped me and I didn't."

"For which we'll put up a candle to the Blessed Virgin," said West softly. "Listen now, my child, I don't want to ask you anything you don't want to tell me, but there are any number of things I should be glad to know. How will it be if I put a few questions to you, and then if you would rather not answer any of them you can say so, can't you?"

"There's very few things I'd be minding telling you." She spread out her hands palm uppermost, a little meek gesture. "Didn't ye take me out of the street and bring me home the way ye would a lost cat? It wouldn't be grateful of me if I wouldn't tell you anything ye like."

"You're not to tell me anything out of gratitude. It is that something has to be done for you——" West smiled at her: did she herself see any reason, he wondered, why the hearth which had sheltered her for a night should not continue to shelter her? Stray kittens are not as a rule harassed by their responsibilities. "And it will be easier for Mr. Marqueray and me to see our way if we know

more about you. Now, to begin, you're Irish, aren't you, and a Roman Catholic?"

"Yes, I'm Irish, and of course I'm a Catholic." She gave the *a* its soft Continental value. "Me name's Phyl-lida Browne—B-r-o-w-n-e. I haven't any money left, and I owe Mrs. Carter seventeen and sixpence halfpenny, that's three weeks for me room and the rest was a little milk and bread she let me have when I'd nothing to eat. I had over £4 when I came out of the workhouse. They didn't want me to go, but I wouldn't stay. Ye get enough to eat, but there are things about it that aren't so very nice, and Matron—oh!" She gave a long shiver. "D'ye know what it's like to hate a person till ye have a pain in your throat? I'd like to sit and run pins into Matron an *hour* at a time."

"Not a whole hour?"

"*Two*.—Besides, I hoped I'd get some work if I came out; ye can't stay in the House all your life: and what me papa would have said to me going there I don't know. So I took a room: Mrs. Carter's: 'twas five shillings a week: I just went there because she had a card in the window, and she didn't mind taking me—the other places I went to didn't seem to like the look of me. Ye see, I had to tell them . . . it wouldn't have been honest not to . . . but Mrs. Carter said she didn't mind. So then I tried to get work, but no one would give me any, and the money went (ye *can't* live without eating), and so at last I hadn't any left, and Mrs. Carter said she was sick of me, and she turned me out."

"Had you nothing of your own—no clothes or furniture?"

"Yes, indeed, I'd a box, but I sold all the things in it bit by bit, at least Mrs. Carter sold them for me. 'Twas only clothes, and brushes and combs, and little things like that."

"Did she sell any jewelry for you?" struck in Marqueray.

"Jewelry is it?" said Miss Browne. "Me diamonds and rubies!"

West could have laughed if he had felt less inclined to weep. Certainly she was not in awe of Marqueray! Indeed, she did not seem to fear any one, unless it were Mrs. Carter: men as they were, and young men at that, West wondered to hear her telling them her little tale as naturally as to a woman. She had shed all her tears, she had borne her shame: courage and candor were the best virtues left to one who had forfeited her maiden claim to modesty.

"No brooches, no watch?" pursued Marqueray, less diffident than West, who softened his voice to Phyllida as to a petted child. "Surely you had a few trinkets?"

"No, not one little one. I left them all behind when I came away."

"Away from where?"

"Italy."

"What were you doing in Italy?"

Phyllida stiffened, between nervousness and dignity. "Ye said I needn't answer unless I like, and I *don't* like. That was a bad time; that was when I was doing wrong. I'd rather not think about that."

Rather like an inquiring dog that has had his nose scratched, Marqueray relapsed into his frowning silence. West went on. "Can you tell us—don't if you would rather not—anything of your life before you went to Italy?" Phyllida looked doubtful. "Anything of your own people—your friends and relations?"

"Oh, ye mean when I was a girl." Phyllida brightened up. "I lived in a little wee village in the west of Ireland all among the bogs. 'Twas very pretty country, and there was lots of bog myrtle, and ye could see for miles and miles all round the house to the blue Mayo hills, and when the wind was in the west ye could smell the sea. I lived with me father, he was an old man and a great scholar: he

taught me Latun and Greek. He was a Captain in the British Army. He fought at Kandahar and Majuba."

"He wasn't much of a Nationalist, then?" said West, vaguely surprised.

"Oh, but he was," said Phyllida. "He fought for the Boers at Majuba. That was after he left the British Army. He didn't stay in it so very long."

"Oh, I see," said West, quite grave.

"He was called Mr. Browne then," explained Phyllida. "After he fought for the Boers he left off calling himself Captain, and he didn't like any one's calling him it. But in the war—the war—he didn't help the rebels much. He said his sympathies were divided and that he didn't like stabbing even English people in the back, and besides he'd lived in Prussia for a year. So he didn't do anything much except sheltering people when the military were after them and keeping guns in the potato cellar the way I thought we'd all be blown up. He died last May twelvemonth on the eve of St. Paschal."

"And did you go to Italy directly after he died?"

"No, I lived on all alone for a little while. The rent was paid till Michaelmas. I was very poor; he didn't leave me any money: he gave all his money away; some of it to the Boers, and some to Young Ireland, and some to help along the Dublin Players because he said Ireland ought to have a National Theater. So," concluded Phyllida with serenity, "there wasn't any left for me. But I wouldn't have minded his not leaving me any if only he hadn't died." She produced a handkerchief and wiped two unexpected tears out of her eyes. "Oh, I wish—I wish he hadn't died! Only if I'd run away to Italy all the same he would have been so ashamed of me. I told—I said the last morning when I was in Italy, 'Me papa would shoot us both if he were alive.'"

"You would never have gone to Italy, my child, if he had lived. Do you say you were all alone after his death?"

"Oh dear no!" said Phyllida, shocked. "There was Thady—he did the house—and Pathrick who was the gardener, and Father Ryan, and, oh, lots of friends I had."

"But you didn't live with Thady or Father Ryan?"

"O' course not, after me papa died." West passed his hand over his forehead. She was so earnest and so candid that he couldn't think how she contrived to be so unintelligible. "There was cousins in Dublin that were going to take me. I didn't want to go to them, though; papa didn't like them, and I didn't either. They were very Englishy people, stiff, stupid, horrid——"

"English people are much obliged to you," remarked Marqueray.

"I said Englishy, not English," Phyllida retorted in a flash. "'Tis not the same thing at all."

Miss Browne was five foot nothing, and when they stood up her head was much on a level with Marqueray's sapphire. But no, she was not in awe of him. To West she was meek and biddable, not to say filial, but she bristled up under Marqueray's mild chaff like a rumped kitten.

"Were you going to live with the cousins in Dublin, then?" West pursued his patient way through the maze.

"'Es: papa left a letter asking them to take me, and Mr. Morgan came over to see me and said there would always be a seat at his table for the widow and the orphan," said Phyllida—"pig! I did hate him. As if any one wants to be *reminded* that one's an orphan: and I wasn't a widow anyway."

"Morgan, of Dublin." West took out a pocket-book and pencil. "What was his address——?" Before he could finish she was on her knees at his feet with a thrilling cry:

"Ye won't—ye won't send me back to them? Me, now? O! I'd rather go in the river——"

"My dear child, get up!" West, horror-stricken, tried to raise her, but she only shut her eyes and buried her face on his embarrassed shoulder, and wept the more.

"—the way they'd always be telling me I was a fallen woman like Matron at the workhouse——"

"Sit down, you silly little kid," Marquerey broke in again in his soft, strong voice. He got up and stood over her, detaching her from his cousin as if it annoyed him to see her clinging to West. "You shan't go near Mr. Morgan of Dublin—Aubrey, can't you imagine the brute? Stop crying, infant,—here's a nice dry hanky for you,—on my word of honor you shan't do anything you don't want to do."

"Yes, that's all very well," said Phyllida, comforted, and sitting down again, but doubling back upon a fresh trail of argument with the incalculable logic of the Celt, "but who is to look after me if Uncle Andrew doesn't?"

"Listen to it, and then ask why we couldn't govern Ireland!" Marquerey groaned. "Cheer up, you can go back to Uncle Andrew to-morrow if you like!"

"But I don't like at all, I——"

"Never mind about Mr. Morgan now," said West hurriedly. Miss Browne made him giddy. "But, my child, had you no woman friends? You haven't mentioned even a nurse or a governess."

Phyllida pondered, searching her memory. "I would never have had a nurse because I never was ill, and I never had a governess because me papa taught me. No, papa didn't like women. He wouldn't have any woman servants in the house because he said they tittle-tattled and that they'd get him in trouble with the police. I knew the women in the village, of course, but they were never let in the house except Mary Finehan, who was lame and stone deaf, and she came in once a week to do the washing."

"But your father surely had friends?"

"Oh yes—he had Father Ryan, and Colonel Butler when he was at the Castle: but me papa didn't go to the Castle because of having fought for the Boers, only Colonel Butler would come and see him. Oh, d'ye mean woman friends?

No, I didn't; there were no ladies in our own rank of life that visited with us. Ye see, papa was more of a Reb than the other families were. There was Mrs. Barry of Castlebar; Thady says she never liked papa after she heard what he said that he'd put a bullet into any man that asked him to put his legs under the same mahogany with Captain Dewey, the R.M. that was going to be married to Norah Barry."

"And your mother?"

"Me mother was English," said Phyllida briefly. "She died when I was five."

"So that all your life you've never had to do with women? I see," said West thoughtfully. And that, of course, was why the child was so natural with him and Marqueray: probably it would have been more alarming to her, because more novel, to confess her meek little tale in a woman's ear.

It was all clear now: clearer than Phyllida knew, for evidently she had no idea that West and Marqueray had seen her with Marchmont overnight, or indeed that Marchmont in the flesh had appeared to her at all. But for the men who had watched her and him it was easy to fill up the blanks in her tale—Marchmont's visit to Ireland, probably to stay with the Butlers or the Barrys, his chance encounter with the solitary child lingering forlorn among her myrtle-covered plains under the white and blue spring skies of Mayo, his libertine appreciation of her sweet childish grace, and the siege that carried her maiden citadel. West and Marqueray parted company here, for with all the odds against her—youth, ignorance, economic pressure—West wondered at her yielding: he read chastity in her, and a high spirit: but Marqueray only shrugged his shoulders over female virtue, which lies mainly, he would have said, in never being tempted. West, too, could not imagine how any man could take advantage of a creature so sacredly protected by sorrow, weakness, and innocence, but Mar-

queray understood only too well the charm that rosebuds have for a voluptuary. Marqueray would no more have laid siege to innocence than his cousin would. But he might have had to fly temptation.

West got up after a moment and with a gentle apology to Phyllida beckoned Marqueray into the other room.

"I want a word with you, Marqueray. I'm going to see this through. It may cost a few pounds, for, so far as I can see, except Mr. Morgan of Dublin there isn't a soul that would lift a finger to save her from—from——"

"The streets."

"But she trusts us, and I'm going to find the necessary cash——"

"Half of it," said Marqueray laconically.

"Do you mean that? The fact is, I never have much margin, but I should like a comfortable berth for this little thing, even if it meant paying for a course of training or an apprenticeship. But I wouldn't for the world let you in unless you want to come; she's on my hands and I'm responsible for her—you never wanted to go back for her at all——"

"Not I, I should have left her to the streets. I thought you a fool for going back, Aubrey."

"Hallo!" said West, startled.

"Yes, I am, rather," said Marqueray with his wintry smile. He turned and lifted down West's old infantry sword which hung in its scabbard on the wall, drew it, and tried the edge with his forefinger. "She's a pretty kid, but she wouldn't be pretty now if it hadn't been for you, my paladin in pince-nez. By-the-bye, why don't you wear pince-nez instead of that light-opera monocle which always—allow me—evades your questing hand when you most want to study my expression? Won't Miss Yarborough let you?"

"What on earth has Miss Yarborough—why should she mind?—I don't know what you mean."

"I don't know that I meant anything at all," said Marqueray cheerfully, "except that you said she was the woman you knew best in town. But don't blush, there's no harm in it so long as your intentions are honorable."

"Harm in what?"

"In anything."

West gave him up. He had no clew to Marqueray's feelings, and not even the eyeglass which Marqueray had kindly found for him enabled him to read Marqueray's eyes.

"Do you seriously want to stand in with me, then? If so, you might let me know what you're prepared to rise to."

"Oh, say ten to ten thousand," Marqueray replied. Quite grave, he stood running his fingers up and down the flat of the blade as if he were thinking more of old days in the war than of either West or Phyllida. "She's so very pretty."

"Very," said West. He drew a bow at a venture. "She is one of those bewitching children that fellows fall in love with at first sight."

"Unfortunately Marchmont has spoilt her for that," said Marqueray with some deliberation. "He ought to be hounded out of every club in town for doing it, but it is done all the same. At all events you and I don't propose to marry her; in fact I rather gather that your own claim is pre-empted. So much the better for you. Most women that have tripped once will trip twice. I wonder what it feels like to stick a fellow with a sword. More juicy, I should think, than potting at him with a revolver. How long do you propose to give this little lady hospitality?"

"No longer than I can help. To-morrow I'll speak to Miss Yarborough." Marqueray's eye gleamed, but he was merciful. "I shall get her to come and see the child: or, no,"—West reddened suddenly all over his face,—"that's hardly possible, in the circumstances. But I'll ask her to let me bring Phyllida to see her."

"I haven't the pleasure of knowing Miss Yarborough. Will she?"—Marqueray's voice deepened curiously—"tell our little friend that she's a fallen woman?" West shook his head. "Women are quick to take that view, Aubrey. She may even"—he smiled down at his cousin—"be disposed to resent the little lady's appearance. Rather a trial of faith, isn't it?"

"A trial——?"

"Why,"—Marqueray slipped the sword back into the scabbard,—"*she's such a very pretty woman to receive bachelor hospitality.*"

"Oh, rot!" said West, and this time his laugh was cordial and unreserved. "Miss Yarborough isn't like that. You don't know her."

"Ah! and I see you do. There, there,"—he slapped West gently between the shoulderblades,—"*have it your own way. She shall be anything you like if she'll look after your little ward for you. Look here. You can put up half the money. But there's one item in the transaction that I should be grateful if you would leave in my hands.*"

"What's that?" said West—not without a suspicion that he knew.

"Horsewhipping Marchmont."

"Tut," said West. "We're not sure yet that it was Marchmont. And if it were,"—he ran his eyes up and down Marqueray, not without appreciation of the significance of Marqueray's lingering and loving clasp of the hilt,—"*I wouldn't let you touch him for any consideration on earth. Man alive, you'd kill him!*"

CHAPTER VI

It hurts not him
That he is loved of me.

MR. RISELEY YARBOROUGH, West's political chief, had never been a popular man. He had forced his way to the front by sheer ability and driving power, but his colleagues were not fond of him, and the fastidious among them were inclined to mistrust him, though more for his loose, cynical tongue than for anything he was known to have done. Recently, Club gossip had whetted its edge on the imperfectly known story of his intrigue—if it was an intrigue—against Robert Vere. People said Vere was a fool, but that Riseley Yarborough was a rogue.

Yarborough was not of Vere's caste. No one knew much of his early days—they were not low enough to be picturesque; neither the *Daily Mail* nor the *Daily News* could make a good story out of his youth at a small country grammar school, or the creeper-covered villa to which his father, a small country solicitor, had retired on his savings. A University scholarship gave him, like many another budding politician, a chance to make his mark at the Bar, and once fallen on his feet he went fast and far, astonishing every one; but he never felt secure till his marriage to Maria Wrey, an ineffective, plain woman with a great deal of money, linked him firmly to the territorial classes.

The career of an adventurer; and yet Yarborough was not an adventurer, for he had simply worked out the instincts of his nature, which pushed towards power and responsibility as plants push towards the sun; if he was now and then a rogue, he never was a mean rogue, for he

never said to himself, "I will be rich," or, "I want office," but simply, "Here is a thing that wants doing; how can I get it done?" He was a very bold, energetic fellow who feared no man and stuck at nothing. In his commonplace parentage and upbringing there was one element, and only one, which a student of psychology might have held to account for his temperament. The luxuriance, the prodigality of an autumn passion and a spring surrender had gone to his shaping, for he was the son of a love-match between a Quixote of fifty and a beautiful woman of twenty-five.

Law had given him his training, but an inborn love of facts rescued him from the common pitfall of the lawyer in politics, for it was never any satisfaction to Yarborough to score the odd trick in a debate unless it was won on the evidence and not on a quibble. When a Government department springs a leak, in nine cases out of ten it will devote all its energy to proving that the leak was sprung while the other party were in power,—but all Yarborough cared for was stopping up the hole. In his youth, indeed, a tendency to apologize when he was in the wrong had been the cause of so much embarrassment to his side that he had been obliged to break himself of it, and still at fifty-seven it survived in a passion for being as well as appearing to be in the right.

When his wife died after ten stormy years, he made little pretense of grief. He had never loved her, and he had a bitter, uncompromising detestation of cant, especially the cant of sentiment—which was in itself no light handicap for a man who set out to acquire power in a democratic age. But he loved the children she left him, his son Selwyn and his daughter Valentine. Yarborough was an individualist; he had no class or sex prejudice; man, woman, or child, duke or bagman, stood to him for what they were worth as living souls. His wife, incompetent and fretful, served him for six months as a toy wound up to yield him a moderate amount of legitimate—perhaps legitimized would be

the better word—pleasure; after that, as an encumbrance. His son was an amusing nuisance who delighted Yarborough's eye by his personal beauty and kept him in a state of irritation by his pranks. His daughter was the beloved comrade, the inseparable ally. Yarborough had little sense of parental responsibility. When Selwyn at eighteen, fired with passion and despair, rushed into the study to announce that he would sooner shoot himself than go to Cambridge, his father merely reached for his check-book and asked how much a young ass would want to get along on comfortably in the Quartier. A year later Val, coming home from her convent school in the south of France, was offered her choice between a career of her own and the post of mistress of the ministerial household. Val said that Park Lane offered the most interesting career open to her sex, and Yarborough dropped his hands on her shoulders and read her with his keen, imperious eyes. "Mind, if you take the job on, you run it alone. I won't have a waiting-lady pinned to your tails. You're not afraid of menservants, are you?"

"No," said Val with her faint, indecipherable smile.

"You're only nineteen, and your mother was a—hadn't any social gift. Did your nuns teach you how to stand up to men and women of the world?"

"I am not," said Val slowly and as if the confession were forced out of her, "afraid of any one or anything."

"Not of me?" said Yarborough incredulous. Val, still faintly smiling, shook her head. "The deuce you aren't!" said Yarborough, gratified. "That's settled, then: I shall make you the same allowance I make to young Rembrandt, and you can take over from to-day."

Aubrey West's position in the household was an anomaly. He had become Yarborough's private secretary soon after peace was signed, upon the recommendation of Robert Vere, who said there was no better way of getting to learn

the ropes, and it had then been an understood thing that in a few years' time West would enter politics on his own. But, once drawn within the sphere of Yarborough's attraction, it was not easy to escape. A harder, vainer man might have done so; West himself might have done so if he had had independent resources. But apart from the allowance made him by his godfather, West had no money of his own, and he was not of the stuff of which the wire-puller, the poor and pushing party hack is made.

A contributory cause was that Yarborough took one of his strong, incalculable fancies to West. "Like will to unlike," and the arid cynic approved of West's modesty, courtesy, and unaffected kindness, as well as of his bent for solid hard work. From a hireling West slipped into the position of a second son of the house, coming and going at meals without invitation or warning, and making himself useful in a variety of functions which are not usually expected of private secretaries. West himself felt that it was the limit when Yarborough instructed him (*a*) to get out of the well-meaning but vague Selwyn a schedule of his debts, (*b*) to pay them, (*c*) to make Selwyn understand that they would not be paid again for a twelvemonth, and (*d*) to disentangle Selwyn from an intrigue with a *femme de quarante ans*, which was purely intellectual on young Rembrandt's side and not at all so on that of the lady. West did it—did it with such a grace that Selwyn didn't mind, and even offered to vindicate his injured innocence by letting West read his letters when the lady sent them back, letters many and long, scribbled indifferently, in an unformed, boyish hand, to "Inspiration of my Art," and "Darling Tibbets"; the sort of letters that convulse a Divorce Court and stick to a man's name for the rest of his life. West patiently read them all. He did whatever he was asked to do.

Certainly it was not the career that he had mapped out for himself. Now and then on some anniversary it oc-

curred to him that years were slipping by, youth and elasticity were wearing out, life was giving him little in exchange for all it takes away—but then, how few there are of us who realize our boyish dreams! On the whole he liked his job, and in his relations with Yarborough there was never any strain except at the time of the rupture with Vere.

Then, indeed, West had been within an ace of resigning. He was prevented by a double reason: the first that Vere sent for him and told him to stay where he was, the second that Yarborough put forward the same proposition as a personal favor. To these may be added West's own conviction that Yarborough was not to blame, and that, if Vere suffered, Yarborough suffered no less. Yarborough was a thick-skinned but not a heartless man, and West had seen signs before of unexpected sensitiveness. "It's a rotten mess," said the Foreign Minister, standing with his legs apart and his hands in his pockets, a fighting attitude familiar to the House. "But you can't do the work of the world in gloves. Look here, young fellow,"—yes, there was pleading in his tone,—“do you suppose I *like* stepping into your godfather's shoes? I haven't so many friends that I can afford to lose one of them. Don't rob me of a second.”

And Yarborough's daughter, taking a sprig of honeysuckle out of her own coat to fasten it in West's, "Oh, Aubrey, don't go—don't you go too! Can't you square it with Mr. Vere? He's so quick to understand. Make him see that we must hold the fort! The Chief means to fight for every inch of ground, we're going to be bitterly unpopular, the F.O. won't be a bed of roses. Poor dear, he's used to defying Cabinets, but he does love to have the working classes behind him, and this time he won't. It may all go together, even his own constituency, if they raise the old 'No Militarism' cry. He will hate it so, and he hates quarreling with Mr. Vere; and if you go too, it'll be a second

slap in the face for him. Stay with him, Aubrey—stay with us.”

West stayed.

“Done those letters, eh?” said Yarborough, coming into the room where West was dictating to a shorthand writer. “Not yet? You’re very slow. Three more to finish? I’ll come back in five minutes; I want to talk to you.”

West finished the remaining letters in four minutes and a half, and as he leaned back in his revolving chair and watched the panting clerk gather up her papers, Yarborough reëntered the room. He sat down near West and in the course of the next ten minutes made West give him from memory a complete abstract of the morning’s work. Yarborough did not follow Trade Union rules. He held it a cardinal sin to take eleven minutes over what could be done in ten. He hated the sight of a notebook, and yet a slip or a lapse of memory put him in a rage. He was a trying chief, but as he exacted no more of others than of himself, he could not be called unjust; and, given a good apprentice, his Spartan training was warranted to turn out a good workman. Aubrey West, who had brought into Park Lane the habits of vagueness and inaccuracy which he had picked up at a public school, was by now as precise as a machine.

“And that little job is jobbed,” said Yarborough, visibly shutting a door in his mind and turning the key. “Now I want to talk to you for five minutes about yourself. I had a note from Vere last night.” The first since the breach! But West was drilled to show no surprise. “He made a suggestion which had already crossed my mind. He wants to know whether it could be arranged for you to get away long enough to contest the South Cambs bye.”

“But—there isn’t a vacancy in South Cambs!” said West, astonished.

“There soon will be,” said Yarborough with his cold

drollery; "at least I've never yet heard of a Church that offers its members the combination of a celestial and a Parliamentary status. Deever's ill—going to die: I had the tip from his brother a day or two ago. John Deever thinks he would like South Cambs for himself. I think the House can get along very well without John Deever. Has Vere spoken of this to you?"

"Not a word. There was vague talk of it some years ago, but I thought it had all dropped."

"Possibly he meant me not to speak of it, but I see no harm in doing so. Should you care to stand?"

West evaded the question. "I haven't the money for it. I shouldn't care to stand unless I paid a fair share of my own expenses."

"That, of course, is between you and the Whips and Vere," said Yarborough. "I suppose Vere knows your circumstances, and that he wouldn't make the proposal if he were not prepared to stand by it. Probably he regards it as a win for the stable. He has no son, and Marqueray, by what I hear, has never cared a straw for politics."

"But I thought it was a settled thing that Harries was to be adopted when Deever went out."

"Harries has just got married to a woman with money and is taking her to the Riviera. He's off politics for the present. That's why we're at a loose end. Nobody foresaw the double drop-out."

"The odd thing is that Marqueray was making the same suggestion to me last night. My godfather must have said something to him about it," said West in a perplexed voice. He refused to admit a fancy that it might have been Marqueray who spoke to Vere. "It's a very kind idea. But it all seems rather hypothetical at present, and it would be very inconvenient for you. I should have to be away a good deal between this and the date of the election, which is vague; in fact, Deever may not die at all——"

"Six weeks at the outside. It's only a question of the

rate of sinking. Cancer on the liver, and they can't operate."

"Good heavens, how ghastly! I had no notion it was so grave as all that. Why, he can't be much over forty-five, poor chap! and he was only married last May——"

"I could manage. Collinson is coming on. You haven't taken much time off this year. In some ways I should be glad of the change. I've often found it a great inconvenience that you're not in the House. You could still give me all your mornings."

"I should not be good for much after a late sitting," said West honestly. "Indeed, I don't know how I should stand the strain of the ordinary hours on top of all my other work. I should have to drop a good deal of it. I can't do it, sir."

"You think you can't," said Yarborough scornfully. "You young men are all alike, can't miss a night's rest but what you must make it up in the day. And that reminds me, why didn't you appear last night? That idiot of mine"—Selwyn, of course—"went off to one of Madam d'Ô's table-rappings. Let us hope he will only marry the medium, but he is capable of marrying the spook. Val thinks it hard that she can't have one or other of you for an A.D.C."

"Not really?" said West in consternation. "Oh, I am most awfully sorry; I'd have come like a shot if I'd had the faintest idea——"

"But you hadn't? You're a bright boy, Aubrey," said Yarborough, staring at him. "Meantime your cousin made himself useful. Handsome fellow, Marquelay. Val likes him. I don't. However, that will arrange itself when you're in the House. You had better speak to Vere."

"I will, but I don't suppose anything will come of it, though it's awfully good of you, sir——"

"Well, think it over," said Yarborough, getting up and strolling to the door. "Let me know your decision to-

night. What time are those infernal sweeps due?" The reference was to a Labor deputation from a sectional strike in his own constituency.

"Twelve-thirty."

"See them for me. Here is what you're to say. Be as uncivil as you like and shoot them out as quick as you can, then get some food and come to me in my study. I'm lunching out, but I shall be in before two, and I shan't go down to the House till four. They don't yet know it, but the other men have caved in and let these fellows down, so they're absolutely negligible from any point of view. They never had a grievance, and now they've no weapon."

The door shut behind him. West glanced at his wrist-watch. He had exactly fifteen minutes to analyze Yarborough's notes in, arrange his own ideas, and adjust his manners to the conciliation of men who would expect to meet his master.

A few minutes before one o'clock, when the deputation had gone away looking a little flat, West strolled into the breakfast-room and threw himself gratefully into a fireside chair. Since his arrival at nine it was the first minute that his mind had not been working at full power. Val Yarborough, coming in with a box of late roses and red leaves sent up from her home in the country, examined him with a fraternal kindliness and forbade him to rise.

"You look fagged out," she said, standing before a black oak dresser to slip great branches of rosebuds into a luster bowl. "Did the Chief make you tackle those unhappy Labor men! Poor Aubrey, what a shame!"

"He did, and, what was worse, he gave me only fifteen minutes' warning," West answered in the amiable monotone which one assumes when all speech is an effort because of some physical *malaise*. "Never mind, let us forget about them. I only hope I made sense, but I don't feel sure of it."

"Of course you did; you always do." Val drew down

the blind over a south window which was filling the room with sunshine. "I can't have my carpet faded," she explained, sitting on a low chair near West. "Won't Mr. Yarborough be in to lunch? Oh, then bring that small table over here by the fire, please, William, and don't wait; Mr. West and I will look after ourselves. Dear me, I'm thirsty." But it was not into her own glass that she poured the wine, and West, who was nearly blind with headache, drank it off before he touched his soup.

Lunching alone with Miss Yarborough was no new experience for the secretary; it happened say once a month or once in six weeks: it was always a pleasure, but West, unobservant for want of personal vanity, never found out how cunningly he was waited on and his taste consulted on these occasions. He did not now know that Val had pulled down the blind to spare his eyes, or sent away William so that there might be no need to make conversation; he did not realize that in the first twenty minutes he and Val scarcely exchanged as many words; nor was he grateful to her when the pain wore off and left him his own man again, though languid and black under the eyes.

"Fifteen minutes for a cigarette," he said, reclining among his cushions as though he felt an immense disinclination to move, but keeping one eye on the clock. "You won't run away directly, will you? I want to talk to you. I've a favor to ask."

Miss Yarborough lit a cigarette of her own and coiled herself on the hearth, rounding her gypsy shoulders against the severe delicacy of an Adams chimneypiece. She was a tall, slim girl, brown-haired and brown-eyed, her features pleasantly irregular; not remarkable in any aspect, and, within a certain limit of intimacy, soon forgotten. Phyllida Browne was no less innocent than Val, and yet the sweet unconscious glamor of her youth and sex clung to her as inalienably as its scent clings to the rose, and no man, not even West, could remain altogether unaffected by

it; but Val inspired no such roving fancies, and in spite of her father's rank and her own fortune she sometimes found herself a wallflower in Mayfair. She had nothing to say to the pleasant subalterns of the Guards' Brigade nor they to her. Yet she was not left lonely, for elder men—Robert Vere, or Mallinson, of the Exchequer, or a smiling Opposition chief, or some shrewd wit from the cross-benches—liked well enough to slip into a neighboring chair. Val had the political world at her fingertips, for Yarborough talked as freely to her as to West. She was as discreet as her father and as effortless in her discretion: her gossip was colored by a warm humanity: she was more interested in other people's lives than in her own.

Already, though she was only twenty-five, people said that Valentine Yarborough would never marry: she had refused three or four good offers: she was wedded to her father—she had taken color from her convent girlhood—she was temperamentally cold: given another ten years, she would develop into a charming mother of other women's sons, a nurse of ambitious young men. "*Nous avons tous assez de force pour supporter les malheurs d'autrui.*" Sitting on the hearth between flamelight and sunlight, the slight, fair neck, her one undeniable beauty, half shaded by the loose brown house dress cut open over her gold necklace, Valentine thought it *was* rather a pity that she had been brought up in a convent. It was as if there were a veil over her, a slight, fine veil of reticence, which by some obscure but inexorable law of her moral being she was compelled to wear. She was never so conscious of this veil as when she was alone with West, and never so languidly at its mercy, and never so impatient of it. She longed to break out of it: wrapped in its delicate network, she felt false to him as well as to herself: it let him see no more of her than a pleasant, well-bred boy: but she could no more escape from it than from the air she breathed. Without indiscretion, any other woman in her place would have

known how to rivet West's eyes upon aspects that were distinctively feminine, but Valentine could not do it, though she would have been fain to do it. In truth there was no need.

West loved Valentine Yarborough. He had loved her all his life, and he had never loved any one else, but he did not often admit as much even to himself. The gentlemaned Londoner was as proud as Lucifer. He held his post as Yarborough's secretary only so long as he could go on meeting Yarborough's daughter without one illicit glance or one word of self-betrayal. This dumb, suppressed passion was like a perpetual toothache or rheumatism, and he grew used to it, as a brave man does to any physical disability, but he did not care to see more of her than he need: and this though Yarborough treated him like a son. West's pride was a personal luxury. So long as Val was free he was not actively unhappy: he had too much work to do and was too keen upon it to have leisure for sentimental sorrows, and his love had its hope, too, and its outlet; for in political life a young man's chance may come any day, and in a quiet way he was always striving to fit himself to seize any chance that came. Of late, however, hope had begun to flag, and West, tired and disillusioned, had kept more and more out of Val's way. But this South Cambs election——! Stoic that he was, he refused to dwell on it till he had seen Vere. Ten to one it would come to nothing. But if——? West pulled on the curb. If he was returned for South Cambs and if he did well in the House and if he was given office and if his income was assured, in ten years' time he would think of getting married.

That he was unfair to Val it would be hard to say, but certainly in their relations—such slender relations, and on his side so non-committal!—he assumed more than he gave. West did not crudely tell himself that Val loved him, but he was far more afraid that he would never be rich enough

to propose to her on approximately equal terms than that she would refuse him if he did. What of that? she was free: it was not his fault if she elected to wait ten years for him; he had never asked her to wait for him: she, a rich woman, could not fairly expect him to sacrifice his pride for her to that extent! Unconsciously he treated Val, because she was rich, in a way in which he would have held it dishonorable to behave to any woman who was poor.

"Do you think you deserve any favors?" said Val, trying to be natural. "Who left a poor lady single-handed last night to face all the hosts of the Philistines? Ever so many people asked me where was my brother and where was Mr. Wynn-West."

"Mr. West is too old for dances."

"My dear, you're four years older than I am!"

"More like fourteen," West said with his grave smile. "I'm growing such a dull dog. I had a lot of work to do, so I stayed at home and did it. But I should have liked to come. I rather envied Marqueray."

"I kept two dances for you."

"That was very kind of you; I hope they weren't wasted."

"Oh, no, I gave them to Mr. Marqueray when he said you weren't coming. He is a most beautiful dancer."

"Then I certainly do envy Marqueray, but you made a good exchange."

Val drew a soft breath. It was difficult not to feel as if she had been gently, kindly slapped and put in the corner, but she would no more own that she was mortified than West that he was jealous.

"Well, I am schooled! So now what is your favor? If it's another stray dog to find a home for, I hope it doesn't bite as the last one did. It would be much more interesting if you were to ask me something for yourself; you should see if I wouldn't do it like a shot." She smiled into

West's eyes. "In short, 'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?'"

West smiled back as in duty bound, but he was not amused.

"It isn't a stray dog this time, it's a stray kitten."

"A lady kitten?" West nodded. "Is this a parable?"

"It's a child—a little thing that I found starving in the street."

"A child?—How old?"

"Oh, not more than nineteen or twenty."

"Nineteen——? Oh, I see!" said Miss Yarborough in an altered voice and rather dryly. "Aubrey, do explain a little more! How do you mean, you found her?"

West was slightly taken by surprise; the atmosphere was less receptive than he had expected it to be, and he was reminded of Marqueray's warning: he shrank from exposing Phyllida to a breath of criticism: but surely Val was not a Pharisee? No, surely not when she knew all; and rapidly he gave her Phyllida's history as he had heard it from Phyllida, down to the night on the bridge and his own intervention and Marqueray's share in it. The only detail that he left out was the uncertain link between Phyllida and Marchmont.

"A baby born in the workhouse! and she only nineteen or twenty!" Val repeated, looking down. "Oh, that is a melancholy case, isn't it? and what in the world can I do for the poor little wretch?"

"Find her a job," said West, and he in his turn spoke shortly. "I'm not asking you for charity, only for advice. Marqueray and I will put up whatever's wanted in the way of money. You needn't even see Miss Browne if you would rather not."

"T'ck, t'ck, how some people do fly out. . . . But, Aubrey,"—she raised her eyes again with a perceptible effort,—“do I understand that you've taken the child into

your own house? . . . You are, you really are——! . . . And, excuse me, do you think it's quite fair on her?"

"No, it isn't," West admitted in a milder tone. He did not mind what Val said of him. "But what could I do? Take her to an hotel at midnight and without any luggage? Or to the workhouse? She is gently bred."

"H'm . . . and I suppose she's very pretty, too; they always are," murmured Val. "Oh, don't be so petulant; by *they* I only mean the gentle, timid things who always drift into the hands of some man or other to be taken care of. You can't deny that you are going to take care of her—you and Mr. Marqueray." She gave a little laugh, as if Marqueray's name touched a string of comedy. "Oh dear, I cannot see Dan Marqueray rowing in your boat! Oh yes, that settles it, she must be very pretty."

West got up. "I'm sorry I troubled you——"

"Another cigarette, Aubrey?"

"—But if you don't want the fag of it perhaps you could give me the name of some committee——"

"Or a chocolate?"

"—Though I detest committees——"

"Maraschinos—fearfully, awfully nice—and an excellent digestive, I assure you!"

"Thanks for a salutary lesson. Marqueray warned me not to tell the child's story to another woman."

He made Valentine blush deep red from her forehead to her neck. "Oh, that is like you," she said in a constrained voice, "you always get angry when I'm in fun." West perceived that he had hurt her, but in his pardonable indignation he felt no regret. "How was I to know she was too good to be pretty?" Val murmured, still struggling between the penitent and the sarcastic. Penitence carried the day. "Dear Aubrey, I beg your pardon, but I haven't seen her yet, so it hasn't touched me as it has evidently touched you. But it's a cruel little tragedy, and you

behaved as you always would behave, and Dan Marqueray behaved better than I'd have given him credit for. Oh! Dan Marqueray!" West wondered angrily what there was in her memory of Marqueray that amused her. Val, however, soon grew grave again. "My dear, I'll do anything I can to help you. What shall I do?"

"I did want you to let me bring her to see you, but I'm not sure that I shall now."

"Yes, you will, of course you will. Let me see, this afternoon the social world claims me: Tea on the Terrace, Mr. Mallinson's dinner at the Ritz, and the new French play after. To-morrow I'm chaperoning Selwyn on the river, and on Friday I'm booked to my eyelids; I've promised to open a bazaar in the North of London, and I haven't yet thought of anything to say—which reminds me, I must ring up St. John and find out what he wants the money for. Tell you what, bring Miss Browne with you when you come to-morrow morning—or shall you have to consult Mr. Marqueray?"

"You seem to have grown wonderfully intimate with Marqueray. Did you give him more than my two dances?"

Miss Yarborough wondered whether West put this question in his secretarial capacity. She was unable to convince herself that it was entitled to be put at all.

"I should have been happy to give him twenty. Of course I was prepared to like him because he was your cousin, but he's charming on his own account: he was always a very handsome man, but his manners are much more attractive than I remember them, and after what you tell me of his disinterested kindness to a little girl who hasn't even any looks to recommend her—oh, don't go, Aubrey, I will be good, only for my life I can't help finding people amusing when they are amusing! but you'll see, I'll be as good as gold to Miss Browne.—Oh but, Aubrey, do tell me what Mrs. Fielden said when you appeared with the kitten under your arm?" West in his narrative had

glided very lightly over the reception of Phyllida in Vivian Street.

"Mrs. Fielden," said the secretary, glancing at his watch, which said two minutes to two, "was a great deal more sympathetic than you are."

"Yes, but I'll be a great deal more helpful," said Val coaxingly. "But—don't go, the study clock is slow—do just tell me what sort of job would suit her? Does she write a good commercial hand and can she spell *parallel* and *accommodate*——?" West's watch now said half a minute to two, and he went out and shut the door behind him a little more loudly than was necessary. He had not even thanked Miss Yarborough for the coöperation on which he ungratefully relied.

Val, left alone, moved restlessly and aimlessly about the room, touching things here and there, setting straight a portrait, shifting a cushion, rearranging a rose-branch in her luster bowl. She lingered before a mirror to examine her own reflection, sunlit in a silver frame, but mirrors never flatter, and the image which this one gave back was scarcely even attractive, for her lips were wistful and drawn and the light had left her eyes. Val leaned her arm along the glass and her forehead on her arm, her bosom rising and falling in a deep breath or two that came very near tears. Modern life can be hard on women. During the last six years, since she left her convent, Miss Yarborough had learned from novels and plays, the conversation of elder women, and Yarborough's own loose frankness, all there is to learn of the duel between the sexes; yet all this floating theory, unrelated to personal experience, left her unguarded and helpless under the slow torture applied by Aubrey West. She was freer than her grandmother, certainly: yes, free to meet West day by day in close intimacy, free to love him, free—saddest freedom of all—to chafe and quiver under those laws of universal nature which are older than prudence and unsparing of pride. Fifty years ago a

woman had less freedom of movement, fifty years hence she may have greater freedom of choice. Meanwhile Val Yarborough suddenly found herself weeping like a child, the tears running down her cheeks. But they flowed only for a few moments. "Oh, by all means cry your eyes out!" Val murmured, letting fall her arms in a weary way. "Isn't that a dignified thing to do?"

Love has no dignity. Val wandered back to the fireside, where West's chair was left as he had been sitting in it, the cushions in disorder, a glove lying where he had let it fall: and she threw herself down and nestled her shoulders against the cushions that were warm from his touch, and kissed his glove without pretending to herself that she would not rather have been kissed by West. "Oh, I am weak," she murmured under her breath, "but it is so hard sometimes—I so rarely have him to myself for an hour—and then to have all the time wasted—Oh! my dear Aubrey, you don't know how hard it is to be always natural, always friendly, when—when—oh, how weak I am! . . ." She was so tired by the conflict of forces which she only half understood that it crossed her mind to wish West would come in unexpectedly so that the significance of her attitude might betray her secret. Then if he loved her he would tell her so, and if he did not love her he would go away and leave her in peace. That he would also leave her in humiliation did not for the moment seem to make much difference; she was already so cruelly humiliated and so unhappy that she thought she would scarcely feel any added pang. Precisely as this wish framed itself in her mind, she heard West's step returning across the hall, and a second later the door reopened. When he came in, he found Val standing up near the fire, very faintly flushed, one hand fidgeting with her gold necklace.

"I left my glove," West explained.

"In here?" Val glanced round the room. "Let me see,

you were sitting in this chair, weren't you? . . . I'm afraid there's no sign of it."

"Then I must have dropped it in the street. So sorry! Thank you." He went out and Val's hand slipped down from her necklace to West's glove. She stood for some minutes without any more visible movement than a statue. At the convent it was whispered among the pensionnaires that Sœur Marie-Angèle, the strictest of all the nuns, was in the habit of flagellating herself with a scourge made of small cords. Perhaps Sœur Marie-Angèle's little whip never inflicted such a sharp and sickening castigation as Val endured after West left the room. The next person who entered it was her brother Selwyn, an olive-skinned Italian youth, dressed in very elegant calling clothes and an incredibly dirty painter's blouse. "Are you going out?" said Val.

"Y-yes, I'm going to see M-Madame d'Ô," Selwyn replied with his little stammer.

"You do know that you haven't taken your blouse off?" Selwyn examined himself. He was as nearly destitute of humor as an educated man can be. "Oh, no more I have." He took it off. "W-what a good thing I came in here first! but very likely W-William would have told me. Or else Madame d'Ô."

"Either William or Madame d'Ô," murmured Val.—"Oh, and you've tied your own tie again. How often must I remind you to let William do it? I heard the Chief telling him yesterday that it was as much as his place was worth if he allowed you to button your own trousers." Selwyn stood like a child to have his tie undone and re-knotted. All men of genius are absent-minded, but they are not all as docile and placid when their deficiencies are pointed out to them as was the Foreign Minister's beautiful son. "Are you in love with any one now, Selwyn?" said his sister.

"No: why?"

"Not with Eugénie d'Ô?" Eugénie d'Ô was the youthful lady whom Val had promised to chaperon on the river.

"No," said Selwyn, taking up his hat. "She's charming, but she has ugly hands and an unpaintable nose."

"You wouldn't fall in love with me, would you, if I weren't your sister?"

Selwyn smiled. "You have pretty hands, anyhow. W-what is this glove for? I have t-two of my own."

"I want you to give it to Aubrey West as you go down. Say I found it after he went."

CHAPTER VII

'Tis one thing to be tempted,
Another thing to fall.

WEST'S headache passed off altogether after lunch, and he put in a hard afternoon's work, "devilizing" for his chief's forthcoming speech at a big political dinner. "West writes my speeches for me," Yarborough used to say. West never said so, but it was often true, and many people knew it, for Yarborough was quite frank about it. West had learned to know by intuition what line Yarborough would want to take, what points he would select for attack or defense, and in which direction his personal as well as his political sympathies would lie. West could write a *précis* which needed little more than expansion and ornament. And Yarborough never had any scruple in picking his secretary's brains; it is the man of no original creative power who sticks at a theft; Yarborough's motto was that of a prince of thieves, "*Je prends mon bien où je le trouve.*"

It was seven o'clock before West got away, and as soon as he was free he jumped into a cab and was driven to Robert Vere's big house in Wellwood Square. In the last five hours he had not given as many seconds to consideration of his own affairs, but the strait waistcoat once removed his mind threw back to them, and his heart began to beat uncomfortably fast as he gave his hat and stick to Vere's footman. The next few minutes meant a great deal to West. He came in unannounced and found his godfather in the smoking-room, but not alone; Vere was in a chair on one side of the hearth, Marqueray on the other.

Marqueray got up—"We were talking about you," he said, smiling at West, as the French say, *du bout des lèvres*, while his eyes remained subtle and ironical. "Are you going to stand for South Cambs?"

If he meant to confuse West he failed in his amiable design. "Did you put Mr. Vere up to writing to my Chief?"

"Oh, why beat about the bush?" said Marqueray. "Here, take my chair; I prefer to stand. Don't be so cautious, Aubrey. Come to the point."

"I always do." West sat down. "Did Marqueray put you up to writing to Mr. Yarborough, sir?"

"Now what could possibly make you imagine that, my boy?" was the bland reply. West laughed.

"I guessed as much," he said cheerfully. "I don't mind; it doesn't make any odds to me. All I came round to say is that I'm under the Chief's orders to decide to-night. It's a point that I can't settle for myself." Marqueray lounged over to the door. "Don't go, Marqueray, there's nothing private in the matter. I know that if you, sir, took the trouble to write to Mr. Yarborough about it, you wouldn't thank me to decline without consulting you. As Yarborough said himself, you may want a win for the stable. It's all more or less impersonal, and therefore I haven't any delicacy in discussing it. Should you like me to go in for it?"

"Yes," said Vere.

"Really? Why?"

"I always meant to see you in Parliament one of these days, and the time's about ripe for it. I should probably have taken this step even if Dan here hadn't nudged my elbow. Yes, he did; he reminded me of the way the years slip by,"—Vere made a wry face,—"which is what a man of my age is prone to forget. That's about all it amounted to, so you needn't feel that you're under any obligation to Dan, which I dare say you wouldn't like: I shouldn't.

No, Dan, you didn't influence me; you have never had a ha'porth of influence over me in your life: you think you can wind me round your finger, don't you? but you can't. Contrary, you can't stop my doing what I want to by advising me to do it." Dan Marqueray sat and grinned. He was on excellent terms with his uncle, and enjoyed Robert Vere's home-thrusts—nine times out of ten. "He's a born wirepuller, this fellow," said Vere, nodding at Marqueray, "but in this small affair I'm free to tell you that he's had no more finger in the pie than a *Who's Who*. He reminded me that I'm not so young as I was and that you're older than you were. Yes, if you'll stand for South Cambs, I'll pay your expenses. It won't be an extravagant seat. I had a chat with Freddy Hope to-day. It ought not to run into four figures."

"It is most awfully good of you," said West. "I can't refuse, and yet I hardly know how to accept. I'm already more in your debt—I sometimes think—than any man ought to be who can scarcely call himself a blood relation."

"I count you as an adopted son," said Vere. "I've no son of my own, more's the pity. A man of my age, and out of the running like me, would have a dull time of it if he couldn't bet on the two-year-olds. And Dan here"—he consulted his nephew with a flicker of his eyes: Marqueray answered him by an almost imperceptible movement of the head—"Dan is no politician," continued Robert Vere. "He plays a different game. I can listen with pleasure to his jungle tales, but I can't back him for a place as I can back you, Aubrey. Mind, I look to you to do me credit. When I bet on my own horse, I expect him to win. I've never backed a loser yet. See that you don't let me down."

"Now you're making me nervous. I'll do my best, but I can't promise that I shall come out a winner. You know well enough, sir, many a man can do decent work as a subordinate who comes to grief directly he's given a job

on his own. If that happens, will you send me in a bill?"

"For your election expenses? No, my boy," said Vere musingly. "No. . . . Put some more coal on, Dan,"—Marqueray complied after his fashion by shooting on half a scuttleful of coal. "I didn't say put the fire out. You have such a heavy hand! . . . Do you tell me, Aubrey, that Yarborough expects you to decide to-night? That's sharp work."

"My chief is not given to letting the grass grow under his feet. I shall drop him a note on my way home."

"Telling him that you'll do it if the local people are satisfied? There will be no difficulty, I feel sure, from what Freddy said. They'll jump at you. Deever's brother thinks he's coming in for it. But he isn't. He wants to do it too much on the cheap. Besides, he's made himself personally offensive to Freddy. And the local people are begging for a man with local influence; John Deever would be a pure carpet-bagger, whereas your father is so well known in the county. . . . I do hope, by-the-bye, that he won't put his foot in it."

West winced. "How?" said Marqueray.

Robert Vere ran his eyes over him but gave him no reply. "You ought to run up as soon as you can and take a look round. Freddy says Charles Day, that's the Opposition man, has been nursing the constituency for the last five years."

"Will you come up and canvass for me, sir?"

"No," said Vere, "I won't. But I'll come and talk to your electors for you. One speech. Between trains. I hate the country at this time of year, and I hate Cambridgeshire more than most counties. But I'll come and talk to your electors for you. Settle an evening meeting, get me a good rowdy audience, and it'll be like old times." He sighed, stretching out his big limbs and squaring his bent shoulders like a cripple recalling his youth. "But I bar canvassing in an agricultural district."

"I'll come," said Marqueray.

"You weren't asked," said West, not taking this offer seriously. "I don't want to be unseated for bribery."

Marqueray stooped down to poke the fire. As Vere said, he had a heavy hand; he put too much force into the performance of trifling actions, or if he did not there was a perceptible application of the brake. "Think I'm joking?" he said. "I never joke."

"You're never serious, it strikes me," said West; "there's an atmosphere of *double entente* about you which annoys me, and you wear your hair too long. I do wish you wouldn't make such a row with that poker——" He seized hold of it and tried to drag it away. Somehow or other, and rather unexpectedly on both sides, the scuffle degenerated into a catch-as-catch-can fight. Perhaps his unforeseen and exciting piece of luck had thrown West off his balance; he was younger, after all, than his middle-aged normal attitude. Marqueray, on one knee before the hearth, and taken by surprise, was obliged to let the poker go, and saved himself with some difficulty from rolling over in the fender. West waved his trophy in triumph, Marqueray started up, and thirty seconds later the poker was in Marqueray's possession again and West was sitting on the floor nursing his wrist. This was not enough vengeance for Marqueray. He took West up in his arms, carried him across the room, lifted him above his own head like a child, and gently set him down on the top of one of Mr. West's tall cabinets.

"That'll teach you," he said, scarcely reddened by his exertions. "You can now rehearse your first speech to your constituents."

Robert Vere was laughing like a schoolboy and clapping his hands. "Confound you, Dan, what about my Chippendale?"

"You and your Chippendale," said Marqueray scornfully. "The discipline of the Service must be maintained.

You, sir, are you aware that you're only a two-pip and I'm a bloody Captain?"

"You unutterable idiot, you've sprained my wrist!" lamented West. "You brute, I'm all over dust!" He sneezed piteously. "Give me a hand down, confound you, I shall spoil this polished floor. Oh yes, I apologize—anything you like! Yes, three-quarters of an inch all over and dark brown. Yes, on my knees if you like. Anything you like, only give me a hand down, for Heaven's sake, before the servants come in to know what the row's about——!"

"Help him down and don't be an ass, Dan," said Robert Vere, wiping the tears from his cheeks. "God save us, he can't go further in the way of an amende than calling your hair brown!" Marqueray swung his cousin down again. He had remained quite grave, except for the light in his eyes.

"Confound you, I'm too old for ragging and you're too frightfully strong," said West, still nursing his wrist. "Is he often taken like this, sir?"

"Six of one and half a dozen of the other," said Vere, impartial. "You began it, Aubrey. Gad, I wish your nominators could have seen you stuck up on the top of my cabinet like a Chinese idol in tweeds. You boys make me feel young again! But you're an out size for London, Dan." He grew suddenly serious. "Ever lose your temper?"

"Naturally," said Marqueray, "when a man takes my own poker away from me."

"Ever lose your temper?" Vere repeated.

"I never have yet."

"I wouldn't if I were you. Ever carry any sort of weapon?"

Marqueray gave him the same contemptuous smile that he had given to West when West was cross-examining him

about Phyllida. "Yes, I bristle all over with guns of different sizes."

"Ever carry any sort of weapon?"

Again the repetition reduced Marqueray from irony to candor. "Not in civilized life. Naturally, when one takes uncivilized risks, one goes prepared. But I do it less than most men under the same conditions. Time and again I've known that I was the one man unarmed in a Latin crowd. I prefer it. Better sport: and puts a finer edge on your nerve. I can get out of most tight places with my hands."

"I should think so," grumbled West, returning to the fireside from the high French mirror before which he had been buttoning up his waistcoat and dusting his trousers. "You're more powerful than you look, which is saying a good deal. You grip like a vise."

"I didn't really hurt you, did I? Let's look at the paw," said Marqueray. "—Oh, I am sorry, Aubrey, I didn't mean to be so rough."

"Rubbish and nonsense!" West exclaimed, pulling down his cuff again, "I was only in fun!"

Vere shot out a long arm and tapped Marqueray's shoulder. "That's a very good resolution of yours, Dan. I should just like you to give me your word that you'll keep it."

"Why, sir?"

"A fancy that came to me while you were breaking Aubrey's wrist. You're only half civilized yourself. Have you ever gone into a fight without seeing red?" Marqueray, this time, was silent; irony, his usual refuge, failed him. "Honor bright," said Vere in his heavy voice, "when you got Aubrey down just now you had to—eh?"

Marqueray remained silent, and West looked up in surprise. He was not a timid man; the idea of personal danger was slow to occur to him at any time, and more than slow, unimaginable, in connection with the rough and

tumble of cousinly amenities. "Do you mean, Marqueray, that when you're excited you lose your self-control?"

"No, I keep it."

"With an effort?"

"Occasionally, if the other fellow is frightened or tries to get away. Things that flutter get on my nerves."

"Then if I——?"

"No. Good God, no!" said Marqueray, going over to the open window. "What are you making of me? Ten thousand times, no! You know I was only ragging, Aubrey. He there"—he jerked his head towards Robert Vere—"refines too much, harps too much on his own subtleties." Through the stillness of aristocratic London after dark the murmur of distant traffic floated in, and the sigh of the wind in the trees of Wellwood Square. Marqueray turned his back on the room. "You're too clever, sir."

"And you," said Vere, "were not half enough licked when you were fifteen. No, I'm wrong, that is banal. Lickings would never have done you any good, Dan"—("You ought to know," Marqueray interjected),—"yes, I've always done my duty by you. And not done it badly, either: you had the makings of a bully in you when you were fifteen, but I thrashed that out of you. You're safe enough now, within your limitations. You wouldn't hurt a youngster like Aubrey. But a man of another class—a man with bad blood in him——" His memory flickered back at random over what Marqueray had said to him the day before at his club—"a Marchmont, say——"

"Oh! March!" said Marqueray. He smiled to himself.

"Decidedly," said Vere, "I shall feel more comfortable about you when you give me that promise."

"Why promise not to do what I never have done and never shall do?"

"Why *not* promise not to do what you never have done—if you're so sure you'll never do it?"

"Because the whole thing's absurd," said Marqueray shortly.

"Is it?" said Vere. "You're the product of a fighting generation. In my time, when I was a young man, we were a gentle and a law-abiding set. We never swore or drank or fought. It wasn't good form. But the war altered all that. It roughened men's tempers and made them so familiar with blood and violence that we've been reaping, ever since, a crop of upper class crimes of passion, the crude betrayal of feelings which in my day educated men didn't feel, or didn't own to feeling. I've watched the change with interest. Say what you will, you young men didn't come out of the trenches as epicene as you went into them." He got up out of his chair and stood before the fire touching his lips with a handkerchief as fine as a woman's. In a refined dandyism of dress and other personal appointments uncle and nephew were very much alike. "You're only my half-brother's son, but you're a Vere all over. You're like me, but you're rougher than I ever was, and you've had the war and six years out of England. Yet I, too, even I, had a narrow escape once, Dan. I lost my temper in a row."

"Well, but nothing happened," said Marqueray, turning round from the window.

"How do you know?"

"Did it?"

"Where's my pipe gone?"

Marqueray shrugged his shoulders. "It is you that are the survival, sir. People don't do these things nowadays."

"Après la guerre finie . . ."

hummed Vere. "People have always done them intermittently and will continue to do them to the chapter's end. Hence the occasional *cause célèbre*. Call it presentiment, superstition, what you will, my boy, as a personal favor I ask you for that promise."

"Given," said Marqueray without another second's hesitation. "Coming over." Characteristically reckless, he slipped his hand into his pocket, and a small black object, from which the lamplight struck a metallic sparkle, whizzed across the room. Vere caught it.

"Hallo! Hallo! Didn't you say you never carried arms in civilized life?"

"Civilization, sir, isn't exclusively a matter of geography."

"Jesuit!" muttered Vere. His face was very grave. "Loaded, too."

"Oh!" said Marqueray with equal gravity, "if I had known you wanted me to promise not to carry a revolver that wasn't loaded, I wouldn't have kept you waiting."

He got no response from his uncle, unless it were a darkening of the trouble and indecision in the clear blue eyes. Vere stood weighing the weapon between his finger and thumb. "After all, I'm blindfold, I can't follow all your play: I've no right to meddle, and I never should forgive myself if . . . Will you take this back, Dan?"

"No, I never take anything back," said Marqueray. He strolled up to Vere, drew the revolver out of his hand, and laid it on a side table. "Never fear, Bobby, I am satisfied.—And here's West thinks we're a couple of barbarians gone adrift in a well-regulated social order." He patted his cousin gently on the shoulder. West, in whose mind revolvers were associated with Sidney Street or the romantic drama, had really begun to wonder whether he were not asleep and dreaming. But when he thought it over, he was less surprised by Marqueray's habit of going armed than by his unconditional surrender to Robert Vere. Marqueray stood laughing down at his cousin. "Well, Aubrey, and so you're going to stand for South Cambs, are you? En route for the Cabinet or the Privy Council. 'The Right Honorable Aubrey Wynn-West, M.P.' Sounds well, doesn't

it? A good, ringing, Parliamentary name. You'll like it, won't you?" He had not failed to mark West's irrepressible, veiled glitter of excitement. "Get in? Of course you'll get in. Think of the female vote! Isn't Charles Day fat and fifty? *In hoc signo vinces*"—"Idiot!" said West, hurriedly dropping his unfortunate eyeglass—"And I'll come and do the honors of Herold for you. I am not struck on politics, but a fight of any sort is always agreeable. I won't speechify, though. Can't, to save my life: can't put ten words together in public: can't bring myself to be civil to my audience. I tried it once,—I was badgered into it,—but when I was on the platform cocked up over all those heads, the only thing I felt inclined to say to them was that they looked to me like fools and probably were. Can you speak, by-the-bye?"

West shook his head. "I can talk to people in a way they understand, but I haven't a grain of lifting power."

"Aubrey is too modest," said Vere. "I've heard him on his legs many a time from his University days onward. He was twice president of the Union, but he won't tell you that, any more than he'll tell you that he's made a name for himself in political journalism. He went to South Wales with Yarborough three years ago, and the winter after that he was all through the North of England campaign. Yes, he can speak. A trifle too finished and slow, perhaps, with an academic audience; they make him self-conscious. But he's quite unexpectedly good with a factory mob. You're only half educated and that the wrong half yourself, Dan, and that's why you despise a crowd"—("Satan rebuking sin!" interjected Marqueray)—"Not a bit of it. I'm no lover of the proletariat,—few of us are,—but why tell 'em so? Milch cows should be driven tenderly. Democracy is an organized—an imperfectly organized muddle, and if you want to get anything out of a mob you must handle them as though you loved them. You're

too prone to take men *en bloc*. To Aubrey they're individuals. Whom do you talk to when you're on your legs, Aubrey?"

"The nearest intelligent face."

"Not a bad plan. I talk to myself and try not to see anybody, but I suspect Aubrey's trick works better. He's always in touch with the men who are listening to him. He talks straight at them and to them, and the result is that he can always hold their attention." West was flushing like a girl under the unexpected praise. "Look at him!" said Vere, pointing with his hand.

"You'll have to grow another skin or two, Aubrey," said Marqueray with his profound, amused, and condescending irony.

West got up. "If you're going to give me personal advice, I'm off. Good-night, sir." He came over to Robert Vere and made his little formal speech of thanks without false shame and without stint. "It's only one more debt that I owe you. There never has been any reason for your doing so much for me, and there'll never be any chance of my repaying you. But I am most awfully grateful to you, and I'll do my best to deserve it. I don't know how to thank you. I can't tell you all it means to me."

"You'll enjoy it, eh?" said Vere, taking him by the shoulders.

"Immensely," said West, with sparkling eyes.

"To be your own man? Not that the private member's job is any very great catch. But you won't be a private member forever. Yes. . . . well . . . let the infant have his rattle. Go in and win."

"Good-night, Marqueray," said West, turning towards the door. Marqueray sprang up. "I'll come with you—if I may." The last words were a concession to some quality under West's silken manner which was more easily felt than defined. West himself was scarcely aware of it, but Marqueray had seen all along that the younger man,

for all his cordial, easy ways, was gently holding his cousin at arm's length. Marqueray was faintly amused but not at all annoyed; he was bent on winning West's friendship, but he did not wish to win it too easily, because after that he would have had to subscribe to the general opinion that West's friendship was to be had for the asking. Marqueray was a born *exclusif*. He cared for nothing unless it were his own. He had no more desire to be one of a score of West's friends, than he would have had to be one of a woman's score of lovers. He was rather pleased than otherwise at the just perceptible chill which pervaded West's "Oh yes, do."

In the hall West paused for a moment to scribble thirty words in his pocket-book, tear out the leaf, and twist it up into a cocked hat note. There was nothing private about the three lines of clear, tiny writing in which he informed Mr. Yarborough that he had seen his godfather and was delighted to accept the arrangement that Mr. Yarborough had very kindly offered to make. He came out with Marqueray into the stately solitudes of Wellwood Square and proposed whistling for a cab—"Why not walk?" said Marqueray. "It's a topping night again."

"So it is," said West, visibly reluctant to walk all the same. "Well, we will if you like."

"Why don't you want to? I'm sure you don't get half enough exercise. Oh, I forgot, Londoners never walk. Come along, it isn't far, and it'll do you good to stretch your legs a bit," said Marqueray, indolently propelling West in the direction of Park Lane. His own idea of a gentle, strolling pace carried him over the ground at five miles an hour. "You'll get fat if you— Are you fagged, or what is it?"

"What is what?" said West irritably. "Nothing's anything, except that it's past eight o'clock and I've any amount of work to do."

"But you look as white as a sheet, Aubrey," said his

cousin. "Here, jump into this; we can talk just as well in a taxi." He held the door open for West, who threw himself down without another word and took his hat off. Marqueray turned and examined him keenly. "You look as if you wanted a drink."

"I'm all right, but I had no tea and I couldn't eat much lunch. Mr. Yarborough lives on two big meals a day, and forgets that his staff aren't all possessed of the same sort of stomach."

"Oh, I am sorry; why didn't you tell me at Vere's? I'd have got you a glass of sherry and a sandwich——"

"Heavens, as if it were worth bothering about!" said West with unaffected carelessness. His health was a constant worry to him, but he accepted it with the same irritable resignation with which one accepts a wet day, taking care of it so far as his work allowed, ignoring it when it conflicted with any more serious claim. "I hate a fuss." A pulse of light began to beat in his eyes, he closed them and put up his hand over them, and a moment or a few moments later he heard his own voice saying, "Where is the river?"

"What river?"

"The river I can hear running. . . ."

"There isn't any river. Drink this, old fellow."

West opened his eyes. The cab, which when he closed them had not left Wellwood Square, was drawn up before the glittering archway of a restaurant, the distant, lulling hum of violins floated in the air, a waiter in knee breeches and silk stockings stood tray in arm on the pavement, and Marqueray, rather pale, was holding brandy to his cousin's lips. West drank it. He had gone as near to fainting as one can conveniently go, and he was still too dazed even to feel ashamed of himself. "Gently does it," murmured Marqueray, supporting West's head while he drank. "Here you are, René. Is that a *Star*? . . . Tell him to drive on, please." He ministered to West with a hand as gentle as

a woman's. "Lean forward a bit, you'll be all right directly. Don't mind me." Between languor, gratitude, and confusion West found nothing to say, and he sat leaning on Marqueray's shoulder and letting Marqueray fan him with an evening paper, while the sparkling night air and Marqueray's cognac performed their work of gradual revival.

The taxi checked again. "Hallo, is this Park Lane? Give me your note, stay where you are." Marqueray sprang out, and West watched him go in a bewilderment which grew stronger with his reviving strength. He could not reconcile this Marqueray of feminine consideration with the careless cynic of his own younger impressions, or with the hard-tempered sportsman of whom Robert Vere had always given him certain fixed ideas, the ideas of a man of sixty, astute and skeptical. Yet West could hardly think that Vere misread his nephew, for Vere was very fond of him and had known him more intimately for years than West for as many hours. When Marqueray swung himself in again, West had pulled himself together, and the color was returning to his face. "Better now?" said Marqueray in his soft voice.

"Yes, thank you," said West soberly; "thank you most awfully, I never——"

"Shut up,"—Marqueray smiled into his eyes. "It was all my fault for pulling you about; I forgot you were rather delicate. Shan't forget again, though."

"Rubbish, it wasn't that!"

"Oh, I dare say not. But why couldn't you say you were feeling faint? I'm top-hole at looking after people when they give me half a chance. You're so shy."

"Marqueray, do let me express a proper gratitude——"

"And did you see Miss Yarborough to-day?" Marqueray deliberately broke in, lighting a cigar. He offered his case to West, who declined on the ground that he could not afford to cultivate a taste for four-and-sixpenny

cigars. If that were not his motive for refusal, he could not have said what it was. "I danced twice with her last night. She was so sorry when I said you weren't coming. She's really rather attractive and as light as a feather. She was in *réséda charmeuse*, Aubrey. I know that was it because I asked her. I said you'd like to know."

"You're most kind." In view of the South Cambs election, West could resign himself to Marqueray's chaff, but he took it with a grain of superfluous salt, not having yet realized so vividly as Val that Marqueray always said what he wished to say. "I hope you made yourself as affable to her as you do to me. I lunched with her to-day. She seemed to have found you—amusing."

"That's all right," said Marqueray grinning. "Did she settle anything about the small lady?"

"I'm to bring Miss Browne"—Marqueray raised his eyebrows—"with me when I go to-morrow morning. She couldn't suggest anything offhand, but when she has seen the child she's sure to have some idea."

"And how is Miss Browne?" resumed Marqueray.—"You don't mind my smoke, do you? Oh, I only thought you might as you were rather off color.—How is the little, small Miss Browne?"

"You know as much of her as I do. She went to bed five minutes after you left, and she wasn't down when I came away this morning."

"Overtired," said Marqueray. "They say babies want a lot of sleep." His voice was singularly tender.

"Marqueray——!" said West. He checked himself.

"How, then?" Marqueray shook the ash from his cigar. Getting no reply, he continued with some deliberation, "That reminds me, you won't forget, will you, that I'm standing in with you? Let me have a statement of accounts some time or other."

"I gave my housekeeper £10 to get her a few clothes. Do you want to pay me £5 back?—My dear Marqueray!"

He fingered the note that Marqueray crushed into his hand. "How absurd, and how utterly unnecessary! I hate your doing it. A check for her premium would be a different thing, but these few shillings for the child's jacket and gloves——!"

"We've argued the point already. There's no reciprocity about you." Marqueray turned his face to West; in the glow of a passing lamp it was a copper-colored mask out of which his blue eyes shone with disconcerting brilliancy. "Why the devil don't you call me Dan? Scores of other men do, that know far less of me than you do. This is a formal offer, and I don't as a rule go out of my way to make myself amiable. Let us swear an eternal friendship."

"Why—why——?" said West, stammering.

"Oh, I'll tell you if you like," Marqueray answered with the coolest carelessness. "I am possessed of seven devils, and they are all urging me to make love to Miss Browne. I am not going to do it. I break no rosebuds." He waited a moment. "Don't misunderstand me. I know myself, and even if I were in your shoes Phyllida would be safe with me. I could not hurt anything so defenseless. But I'm hard driven."

"I saw you were attracted by her."

"I never tried to conceal it." Marqueray's cigar had smouldered out. Preparing to relight it, he struck a lucifer and broke it, struck and broke a second.—"Curse the matches!" he flung out impatiently.

"Not the matches."

Marqueray followed the direction of West's eyes. "Good God, how my hand is shaking!—Well, you see how it is with me."

"Yes, I see."

With his singular frankness, Marqueray continued to face his cousin. "And that offends you, and you can't think why I say it? Well, since I'm over twenty-one, it

isn't from any desire to offend you. It is that I'm tired—tired of keeping myself to myself, as the old women say. You think me very unreserved, don't you? But I never was before, and if you snub me probably I never shall be again. Can't you make allowance for a foreign training? I dare say you hardly remember what a haphazard life mine has been. I was mainly brought up abroad; I lost my own people before I was twelve: from twelve to fifteen I suffered hell at an English private school where if they taught anything it certainly wasn't ethics: after that Robert Vere looked after me. I'm very fond of Bobby, but one can't go to him for moralities. I never shall forget the eccentric advice he gave me the one time I did go to him. I'm in deep water now, and I want some one who will stick by me and lend a helping hand. I can't tell you any more yet. Some day I will. I should like to now." A shade flitted over Marqueray's vigorous, sanguine features. It crossed West's mind that his cousin would face death, perhaps had faced it, with the same almost imperceptible nervous contraction, so much and no more. "Although I funk doing it, and that's a fact. . . . Give me your hand, Aubrey, will you?"

"No. I don't understand you."

Marqueray drew back. "Really? You mean you don't trust me."

"I don't trust or mistrust you," said West, white with the effort of his refusal. "I simply don't understand you."

He could not bring himself to lay his hand in Marqueray's. He felt shy, and more irritated by Marqueray's foreign eccentricities than if he had known that his cousin had foreign blood in him. To have lived much abroad was not half enough excuse.

"And do you never trust beyond what you understand?" Marqueray murmured. "Wise man!"

"I can't sign a blank check, Marqueray. The men who

do that are the men who don't care if their checks are dishonored."

Marqueray was silent a moment. "What don't you understand?"

"You: your code from beginning to end. I'm not saying that it's peculiar to you—thousands of men think as you do: but I don't, and I can't stand it at any price. Take one point: your—I can't call it love—for this unhappy child." Marqueray started. "Or is that your idea of love," said West with irony, "to want to degrade an innocent woman because she's defenseless?"

Marqueray took his cigar from his lips and expelled a wreath of smoke. "You certainly are unworldly. She ran away with Marchmont."

"You don't believe in her innocence?"

"I'm not sure that I believe in any woman's innocence except as a negative virtue—'Malkin's maidenhood that no man desireth.'"

"Here, take your money back," said West.

"Aubrey——"

"Take it, please, or I shall tear it up."

"I beg you to observe that I don't propose to lay a finger on Phyllida."

"You had better not," said West fiercely, "while she's in my care. But the way you think of her is enough. Take it, Marqueray. She shan't lie under any obligation to you."

Marqueray smiled. He held the note for a minute between his fingers as if he, too, would have liked to tear it, folded it and put it away in his pocketbook. "And here we are in Vivian Street." He opened the door. "I suppose you're aware that you've insulted me, twice over, about as deeply as it's possible to insult any man? No, don't apologize. I can wait. I'm very good at waiting. Hallo, are you still shaky on your pins?" He sprang out. "Take my arm. No, I won't come in, thanks." He stood

with his hands in his pockets, looking down on West from the height of his cool Aurelian philosophy. "The sooner you get to bed the better."

"Oh! damn you!" West cried, leaning against the door, "you make me feel as if I'd committed a murder!"

Marqueray's smile broke out again, but changed, genial, and sunny. "Tell you what, it strikes me I was an ass to worry you with all this when you weren't up to the mark. You run too much on your nerves, don't you? Never mind, old fellow, I'm not hurt, really. You couldn't possibly understand, and I was an ass to say so much when I couldn't say any more. I can wait. You'll know me better by and by. Meanwhile, if I get into deep water, I shall sing out to you for a rope just the same as if you hadn't insulted me at all." He swung himself down the steps with his mischievous laugh.

"Marqueray," said West swiftly.

"Hallo?" came Marqueray's voice from the darkness of the humming car.

"You owe me £5."

"Infant! young infant!" said Marqueray—"the Savoy, please, and cut your corners—young infant of six, don't you wish you may get it?"

CHAPTER VIII

I have heard you say
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven.
If that be true, I shall see my boy again.

WHEN towards ten o'clock the same evening Phyllida was apprised of the forthcoming interview, she was not so much alarmed by it as West had expected her to be. She asked one or two questions—how old was Miss Yarborough, and (inevitable curiosity!) was she very pretty? Then, apparently a fixed idea in Miss Browne's small head, "Will she tell me I'm a fallen woman?"

"No, my child, I'm sure she won't," answered West, in whom this mournful formula always woke an agony of pity. He did not know what to say to Phyllida or how to raise up her bruised spirit. West was not a man of the world and drew none of Marqueray's fine distinctions, and if he had stood in Marqueray's shoes he would have whistled caution down the wind. His attitude was logically less defensible than Marqueray's. "She'll be all that's kind and gentle." In saying so, he was sincere—he was not afraid that Val would allow what she called her persiflage to play over Miss Browne—Val had better not! Although West was theoretically too humble to raise his eyes to his chief's daughter, in practice he was rather stern with her if she didn't mind her p's and q's. "And she's promised to think of something you'll like doing. You won't be afraid of her."

"As a rule I am not afraid o' people," said Phyllida with dignity. It was in the pleasant hour after dinner, and they were alone by candle-light, West smoking in his

chair, Phyllida sitting in a cozy, fire-lit heap on a cushion at his knee. The situation was anomalous and improper but not at all embarrassing, so sure was Phyllida of her footing, and so filial in her attitude. She had been alone all day, eating her meals in solitary ladyhood, and waited on by Eliza, who refused to let her come into the kitchen, in spite of Phyllida's artless assurances that at home when her papa was out she had often had a piece with Thady at the back. It would have been tiresome, dull, in short ridiculous, that when Mr. West came in Miss Browne should not come down to dine with him. Where else should she dine?—the way he wouldn't be wanting her to sit up in her bedroom! Phyllida paused to arrange her ideas. "I'm not afraid of anything unless I can't get enough to eat. I don't want any more of that. But o' course I know I can't stay here always." She gazed up at West out of her candid, unfathomable, childish eyes. "You're so good that I don't care how much I'm owing you, but still ye wouldn't want always to go on paying for me food. I've a great appetite. Will Miss Yarborough get me some work to do?" West, amused but approving, dared say she would. "That'll be all for the best," said Phyllida, scrambling off her cushion and putting her hand on his knee to help herself up. "Wirra, me foot's gone to sleep."

When she retired at ten o'clock, she found Eliza turning down her bed and putting a hot water bottle in it and hanging her nightgown over a chair to warm at the fire, a luxury which Phyllida was the only inmate of the house to enjoy. "Shall I brush your air for you, Miss Phyllida? You let me undo them ooks at the back. Your ands is cold. Siddown a minute."

Phyllida, after graciously letting Eliza slip her into a dressing-gown, seated herself at the fire and warmed her feet while Eliza brushed her hair. "Eliza, what is Miss Yarborough like?" she asked, beginning all over again as a woman does when she has heard only a man's opinion of

another woman. "I'm going to see her to-morrow. Mr. West is taking me. I'm to be ready by nine. Is she very pretty?"

"Nothink to write ome about." Mrs. Fielden gave a slight sniff. "Too much like two bits o' board gummed together. She asn't got a lovely figure like you ave. Set still, duck, you'll mike me pull yer air."

"D'you think I have a pretty figure? I wonder if—if other people would think so."

The Nonconformist drew the comb lovingly through Phyllida's dark, curling locks. "Fivor is deceitful n budy is vine. Still there's no arm in bein mide like a woman an not like a lampost; but there, I dono what lidies is comin to nowidys—seem to think they know better n their Creytor what's wanted of a woman. Miss Val, she's got er eye on Mr. Orberey. I don't sye no to that; she'll ave a tidy bit o money when er papa dies an that's one good thing, an she sets the world on im and that's another; give the eyes out of er ed she would to catch im, but she yn't caught im yet, an I don't much care if she never does. I don't old with er mannish wys, smokin an callin im by is nime an settin about on the edge o' my tible as if the plice belonged to er; a man ought to be master in is own ouse, an I dono if Mr. Orberey ever will be if Miss Val marries im. Let alone she don't look as if she'd ever ave any childring. Now anyone cd see with arf an eye as the gentleman as marries you'll ave is quiverful."

Phyllida gave a great start. "Oh, Mrs. Fielden! oh! that's cruel. Ye know——"

"Ho yes,—set still, Miss Phyllider, I can't elp pullin your air if you twist about so,—I know you've mide one slip. But I dono ow tis, seems to me I'd rather ave a biby too many than a biby too few," said Mrs. Fielden cheerfully. "It's bad enough to ave childring when you didn't ought to, but seems to me it's worse not to ave em when you did ought to. Now Miss Val, I dono ow it'd be with

er, she don't seem to ave no room to put em in, but as fer you, if there wasn't arf a dozen beds in your nursery it wouldn't be *your* fault. There's usbins an usbins, but you're the sort o' woman, Miss Phyllida, that's born to elp a man out. Lord knows some of em tike a deal of elpin."

"I should think Mr. West would make a very nice husband," said Phyllida, ruminant. Mrs. Fielden eyed her rather queerly. She would have thrown a shoe with hearty good will after Phyllida and any other man than Aubrey West. "Much better than Mr. Marqueray. Is Mr. Marqueray married?"

The Nonconformist dropped her brush. She stooped to pick it up. "Im? No fear. E yn't a marryin man."

"Oh?" said Phyllida, still musing. "But he—he wouldn't be a bad man, would he, like some men are? He isn't such a lamb as Mr. West, but I'd never think he'd be cruel."

"Lamb indeed," said Eliza with another sniff; "not much lamb about im. Eat you up, e would, as soon as look at you. Now my lovey never you mind about Mr. Mercury but jump along into bed as quick's you can, so's you'll be up in good time an not keep Mr. Orberey witin. I always ave said an I always shall sye, if there was more young men in the world like my Mr. Orberey, there wouldn't be so many pore young femiles that yte the dye they ever set eyes on a pair o' trousers."

"But I like Mr. Marqueray's trousers," said Phyllida, entirely failing to follow Mrs. Fielden's drift. Fallen woman though she was, Miss Browne retained the good child's habit of not hearing anything that good children ought not to understand. "They're beautifully creased. I'd like to have told Mr. West to-night that his are getting the littlest wee bit baggy at the knee."

("I never see sich a biby," said Mrs. Fielden later on to her husband. "I tried to give her an int, but everythink seems to run off er like water off a duck's back. To ear er

talk, you wouldn't think she'd ever touched a man with a pitchfork.'')

And Phyllida asked no more questions. She was asleep by half-past ten, and came down to breakfast looking so fresh and pretty that West was almost disappointed; he wished Val to pity her, but what was there to pity in this rosy, delicate, smiling child? She ate a very good breakfast, a better breakfast than West, who had sat late over his letter-writing in defiance of Marqueray's counsels; he admired afar off her youthful raids upon the bread and marmalade.

It was twenty minutes after nine when West, who came and went in Park Lane like a son of the house, led Phyllida into Val's library. Phyllida was like a kitten in more ways than one. She was not so much afraid of people as of places, and she hung on West's arm with wide, scared eyes on finding herself in such novel surroundings. She had never seen so many books in her life. The very air of the room was strange to her; the smell of morocco was mixed in it with the smell of violets, and it was so full of dancing notes that a red-gold October sunray, which slanted across it from a small southeastern corner window, shone like a fiery tunnel, and one could fancy oneself walking up it and away into the October blue. One wall alone was not embrowned in literary russet and gold, and there on a wash of indigo hung a white lady under a gold arch—a naïve sprite of a white lady stepping down stairs which began in her own glamour world and ended on Val's faded carpet—a miracle of warm life and verve and the craftsmanship that can forget its own cunning. This caprice of Selwyn Yarborough's vagabond brush, which he called "Spring," or "Nymph Surprised while Bathing," or "Girl with no Clothes on," or even "All gone to the Wash," in inverse ratio to the sensibility of his audience, was a recent birthday gift to his sister. Phyllida turned her eyes away. She preferred ladies pink, blue, mauve—

anything but white. But there was no comfort to be had from Val's big writing table, on which lay a box of cigarettes and a pair of fencing foils and a mask. Phyllida wheeled suddenly and clung to West's arm. "O! I don't like this place so very much. O! what'll I do if she isn't kind to me?"

Aubrey West was in love with another woman. But he was only eight and twenty, an age when a man's nerves will vibrate dangerously under any indiscreet touch. A thought darted into his mind that the sooner Phyllida was out of Vivian Street the better, but what he said was, "Don't, dear, don't, you shall stay as long as ever you like——!"

"Good morning, Aubrey," said Val from the doorway. He had left it open, and Miss Yarborough had, very naturally, come in. Phyllida, as naturally, gave a violent start and dropped West's arm, and West turned round feeling thoroughly annoyed.

"Oh, there you are! Then I'll leave you two to make friends," he said with an imploring glance at Val. "You're sure you can find your way home, my child?" He often called Phyllida "my child"; it came more readily than either the formal "Miss Browne" or the over familiar "Phyllida" which sprang naturally to Marqueray's lips.

"Oh, I'll be all right," said Phyllida. "Ye gave me the money for a cab, but I won't spend it."

But she gazed wistfully after West when he went away leaving her alone with the formidable Miss Yarborough. All women were formidable to Phyllida, whose experience of her own sex had been narrow and painful. Yet when she stole a glance at Val, her spirits began to revive; this tall, merry-looking girl was not so very old and not at all like her enemy of the workhouse. Was it true that she was in love with Mr. West? Ah, poor thing, all her sorrows to come! Phyllida felt a matron's pity for Val's ignorance of life. It was a further consolation that the initiative lay

with Val, for Miss Browne had courage enough and to spare for any passive part; her strength was to sit still.

Val was not really feeling merry, for West had led her to expect a younger and more rustic Phyllida; and for this he was the less to blame because the class sense and class manner slept in Phyllida till they were aroused by a hint of class criticism. But Val thought he must have misled her purposely. This *demoiselle* in her modest gray suit and fur cap, with her polite bend of the head and easy silence, how lovely she was, and lovely in what a charming way! Surely any man must admire her lustrous wave of hair, the pleading eyes under her thick lashes, the finished grace of pose and movement, the pale rose-bloom of youth—and most of all a man of West's temperament, sensitive to the more recondite aspects of beauty. Val's was not one of those common minds—common in both senses of the term—which leap to suspicion, and she was sufficiently a woman of the world to give West credit for a sense of honor and Phyllida for innocence. Alas! it was his chivalry and her innocence that Val feared. Val's nature was not meanly jealous: she neither denied Phyllida's beauty nor hated her for it: she simply shrank from contact with it as she would have shrunk from physical pain. She would have liked to run away. But she was not her father's daughter for nothing; Riseley Yarborough had salient faults, but no one could say that he ran away. "Come and sit by the fire," said Val in her gentle, coaxing voice. "Are you afraid of me? I'm rather afraid of you. But I should like to make friends. Do you think you could have me for a friend if we were to pretend that we've known each other for years and years?"

Taken by surprise, Phyllida blushed like a rose under this direct wooing. She felt very young and that Val was years and years older. But she was a lamb all the same; one might have known that any friend of Mr. West's would be a lamb. Phyllida hesitated a moment—some one had

thrust a knife very deep into her heart, giving her a cruel wound, which was perpetually throbbing and stabbing her with its unforgotten pain. She hesitated, and then—"Ye know I'm a fallen woman?"

"Oh——!" murmured Val, on whom this phrase had much the same effect as on West or Marqueray. She forgot her own trouble and drew Phyllida like a child into her arms. This was the one form of reply that Miss Browne thoroughly understood, and she closed her eyes and nestled like a child into Val's healing clasp.

"I didn't," she whispered, "mean to do wrong."

"I know, I know."

"And when I knew, I went to confession, and Father Francis gave me absolution and said the Blessed Virgin would forgive me, and he gave me ever such a wee penance because I never meant to do wrong. But men, they don't forgive." Phyllida sighed. "Father Francis said 'twas all washed away, and so long as I never did it again I never need fret over it any more. But other people say ye ought never to forget and that ye ought never to think of yourself as being like other girls when you're not."

"Who said that?"

"Matron. And Mrs. Carter said worse," continued Phyllida, pouring out a secret bitterness which she had concealed even from West. "She said 'twas a good thing me baby died. She said he was a bastard brat."

"Oh, my child, don't think any more about Mrs. Carter!"

"It wasn't very kind of her, was it?" murmured Phyllida. "Me own little boy! Sure it wasn't his fault if he hadn't any father. His mother loved him, she did. Oh, he was so pretty! *You* don't think it was my fault he died, do you?—the way Matron said Our Lord took him away from me to punish me because I didn't deserve to have a child, and that I'd never see him again."

"Don't tell me any more about those women," Val said

in a constrained voice. She was notoriously sweet-tempered,—“weakly amiable” was Caroline West’s phrase for her,—but here again she was not Yarborough’s daughter for nothing, and self-control had not come to her till after many a year of convent discipline. “What do they signify? I hate feeling angry unless there’s something to be done. Tell me about your baby, was he fair or dark?”

And that, Phyllida reflected, was what neither Mr. West nor Mr. Marqueray had once thought of asking her; nor had Mr. West or Mr. Marqueray ever taken her in his arms, the language that she understood best, for she was one of those who may be said to think with their bodies. Not that she would have liked Mr. West or Mr. Marqueray to take her in his arms—certainly not Mr. Marqueray; it wouldn’t have been at all proper (Aubrey West would have felt a trifle piqued if he could have followed this distinction); and yet there was no doubt of it that one felt safer that way than any other.

In the course of the next hour Val learned more than West or Marqueray knew about Miss Browne, not so much because Phyllida was shy of them as because Val thought of more questions to ask. She heard a great deal about Phyllida’s early life, and Captain, or Mr. Browne, and the Butlers at the Castle, and Thady and Father Ryan. She heard a little more about the workhouse and Matron, with whom she would have liked five minutes’ private conversation, though she recognized that Phyllida was a problem difficult to cope with on State lines and with State resources. She heard most of all about Phyllida’s infant, though one would have said there could not be much to hear, since he had lived only three days in a weary world. The chaplain of the workhouse had christened him. “I didn’t know what to call him,” said Phyllida. “They said call him Thomas or John or some sensible name like that, but I hate sensible names. Yet I couldn’t call him after papa when papa would have been so ashamed of him. So

then I called him Thady, because I'm very fond of Thady, and I knew *he* wouldn't mind."

Val stroked Phyllida's hair in a musing silence. For all her full-flowing transparent candor, Phyllida had left the same gap in her tale as when she told it to West; she neither apologized for her omission nor in any way alluded to it; Val would have preferred to spare her reticence, but she had received certain instructions, and Thady's name gave her an opening to put a direct question as delicately as she could. "You didn't care to call him after his father, then?"

"O mercy!—no," said Miss Browne emphatically.

"Phyllida," said Val, slipping her hand under Phyllida's chin, "is there no one now that you've any claim on, or that has any claim on you?"

"No one—only Mr. West and Mr. Marqueray."

"Not the man you went away with?—Dear, I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid you must tell me how it was. I won't tell any one else, not even Mr. West, if you would rather not."

"'Tisn't that I mind their knowing," said Phyllida candidly. "Ye can tell Mr. West and Mr. Marqueray if they like. 'Tis only that I don't like talking of it, and Father Francis said I wasn't to. He said—not to let my mind dwell on it for fear I'd wish meself back. But that doesn't matter at all because I wouldn't not if I was alone at the North Pole."

"Did it hurt so much?" Phyllida nodded solemnly. "Did he—was he unkind to you?" Phyllida nodded again. "Poor little Phyllida, and did you care for him——?"

"Not so very much," was the unexpected reply. "I'd rather have gone to him than to me cousins in Dublin." Then, as Val's face betrayed a certain change of feeling, "Ye see, I never thought then about its being wrong."

"Oh," said Val thoughtfully, and continuing to stroke Phyllida's hair. She had felt repelled, she was still faintly

disappointed, for a hint of calculation would have been hard to forgive; but after all it was mere cruelty to apply adult standards to the Phyllida of the Mayo hills a year ago. "Then you aren't very fond of him now?"

"Me fond of him?" echoed Phyllida, her eyes as round as saucers. Apparently it had never in her wildest dreams occurred to her that any one could fancy anything so inconceivably preposterous. "Fond of him is it! why I wouldn't care if I saw him dead at me feet."

Val slipped away abruptly and went over to the window. For her life she could not help laughing.

"You're not cross with me?" came a pathetic, deserted voice from the fireside.

"No, Phyllida, no," Val steadied her voice with an effort. "But shall I tell you what you are?"

"A f——"

"Be quiet!" said Miss Yarborough with an energy which made Phyllida jump. "Little thing, if you ever use that phrase again in my hearing you will be shaken." She returned and took Phyllida by the shoulders with a menacing air by which Miss Browne was not alarmed. "Never mind. It's only that when people look as romantic as a sonnet it is disconcerting to hear them talk plain prose."

She glanced at her watch. "Now to business. I'm going to say something rather disagreeable, but it's common sense, so you must take it like a dose of medicine. I had a letter from Mr. West this morning. It was written late last night after thinking a great deal about you. If you will give me the name of the man you went away with, he wants you to know that he's ready to go and see him and make him contribute to your support, which would be only fair." Phyllida's eyes flashed. "You wouldn't like that? He thought not, nor should I if I were you. But suppose Mr. West could persuade him to marry you? He ought to do it; and if, as I suppose, he was a rich man, and what

is conventionally called a gentleman, you would be far better off than you are now, for no one need ever know what has happened. Mr. West asked me to point out to you"—Val's voice was faintly tinged with irony—"that if you were safely married you would get your good name back, and you wouldn't have to work for your living."

"Would Mr. West like me to go back to Ha—to him?"

"I don't know," said Val. She would have given worlds to know.

"Would Mr. Marqueray like me to go back to him?"

"I haven't spoken to Mr. Marqueray." This time Val looked rather curiously at Phyllida, whose constant reference to Marqueray as her co-guardian did not square with the situation as Val read it. "But I don't doubt he would. Men think a great deal of varnish."

"I'd be sorry to vex Mr. West and Mr. Marqueray,"—Phyllida was sober but firm,—"but I never could do that. He never would marry me, and if he would I'd sooner not. Ye're not married, Miss Yarborough, so ye don't know how very dreadful it is." She gave a sudden shiver and for a moment her face grew quite pinched and wan. "Oh! if I'd known what it was like I'd sooner have gone to me cousins in Dublin. Oh dear! I thought at first I was mad or he was mad or the world was coming to an end. But I shouldn't talk of that to you that aren't married. And o' course ye get used to it after a while, when the strangeness wears off. But ye can't *like* it—there's nothing to like *in* it that I can see—and, oh dear! once ye were free, ye wouldn't go out of your way to have any more of it."

Val indulged in a quiet laugh. "So that settles that, and you won't want Mr. West's kind offices. I dare say he'll be very much relieved; it was probably nothing but a high sense of duty made him offer them." She gave a little shrug of her shoulders to the strange male point of view which could regard marriage with her seducer as a safe asylum for Phyllida. But West's letter had been written

after his conversation with Marqueray overnight, and Val if she had known of it would have agreed with West that any marriage was safer for Phyllida than to remain without other defense against Marqueray's passion than the frail curb of Marqueray's will. "But if you don't do that, what will you do? Mr. West asks me to ask you, because you see" (did she see?) "it's rather difficult for a man in Aubrey West's position.—Have you any ideas of your own?"

She was agreeably surprised at the shrewd common sense with which Phyllida met her. "Ye mean that I can't go on staying with Mr. West. O' course I can't, I never ought to have gone near him at all; not that it matters so much for a man, but still I'd hate any one to think harm of Mr. West, because he isn't like that. But where can I go? I'd sooner not go back to Mrs. Carter, and indeed I'm sure Mr. West and Mr. Marqueray wouldn't let me. And I haven't any money." She made her little submissive gesture with her open palms. "Only what Mr. West gave me for me cab. He paid for all me clothes, and Mrs. Fielden made me get three of everything down to me very stockings. It cost a great deal of money, though I got them as cheap as I could. We went to the shops in Wilton Road, which Mrs. Fielden says are the cheapest in the neighborhood, and so they are much cheaper than the Dublin shops, but when ye've everything to buy it soon runs up. I owe Mr. West nearly £10, beside 17s. 6½*d.* he wrote a check for to Mrs. Carter."

"You would like to get some work to do, then?" Val suggested tentatively.

"Wouldn't I so! 'Tis what I was trying for all the time I was with Mrs. Carter, only they wouldn't take me without a character. I don't see but what I wouldn't sew just as well if I was a f—— Well then, I didn't say it! Ye needn't be jumping on me."

"Are you a good needlewoman?"

"Not so very," said Phyllida truthfully. "But I'd learn. I can knit stockings, and embroider, and make Carrickmacross lace, and Limerick, and crochet for sheets and tablecloths—I did use to make that for all the cloths at home, two feet deep all round and embroidery in the middle, so sweet they were, and papa would get them mounted for me in Dublin on the fine damask. I tell ye, I don't think much of your Englishy damask. I'd like to make a real Irish tablecloth for Mr. West.—But I'm not so very good at plain sewing. Still, I could learn. Ye can always learn if ye try, and I would try, that I would."

"I heard of a post yesterday that might suit you. I have a friend who's married to the vicar of a church in the North of London, Mr. St. John Drew, so when Mr. West came to me about you I rang her up on the telephone and asked her if she could suggest anything. She said one of her own maids had just gone off without notice and that she would be very glad for you to come to her at once if you didn't turn up your nose at the idea. She is kind—kind in rather a stern way, but you would soon get round her. I don't know if you would mind living in a Protestant clergyman's house, or whether Father Francis would approve of it——"

Phyllida looked more than doubtful. But she found her way out of that difficulty by one of those odd back doors which never fail to excite surprise in the Protestant mind. "Maybe the best plan wouldn't be to say anything about it to Father Francis till after it was settled.—'Tis not as if it were a sin."

"Oh! I should think that would be a very good plan indeed," said Val cheerfully, "if Father Francis wouldn't mind. Mrs. Drew understands that you would want to go to Mass and Confession. She and St. John—her husband—are on excellent terms with the Roman clergy in their parish. Mr. Drew is a High Churchman, if you know

what that means. You don't? Ask Mr. West, he's High too, he'll be delighted to tell you all about it."

"Is Mr. Marqueray a High Churchman?"

Val was startled. She liked Dan Marqueray, but her estimate of his virtue was cynically low, as low as Mrs. Fielden's. She, too, thought Marqueray a wolf—a handsome and agreeable wolf, but dangerous company for kittens. "I shouldn't imagine that Mr. Marqueray has ever troubled his head about the subject in his life, or knows one end of a church from the other.—But Mrs. Drew is very sensible, and I don't suppose Father Francis would mind when he got to know her."

"What would I have to do?"

"Any odd jobs. They have a nurse and one other servant, and Mrs. Drew does a good deal herself, but it's a very busy household, and you would have to help with the mending, take the kiddies out for walks, dust, do the flowers, shop, run errands, and make yourself generally useful. There are three children under five, the youngest a boy only a few months old——"

"Would they let me nurse him?"

"Probably Mrs. Drew would be only too glad, for the nurse is young and inexperienced, and she doesn't much like trusting her, as the infant is rather delicate. If you know anything about sickness——"

"—Me that nursed me own papa that was always getting ill! I *can* nurse, 'tis the one thing I can do; Dr. Burke used to say I was born to be a nurse, that I'd the fingers for it; and the time papa broke his leg, going up with Cassidy in the cockloft that the police were after, Thady and I did everything for him. And of all things I'd sooner nurse a little, wee, ailing baby!"

"I wish I'd met your father. He must have been a charming man," Val murmured. "Would you care to go to Mrs. Drew, then?"

"Would I not!" Phyllida clasped her hands. "Care

for it, I'd just love it!" She folded her arms over her bosom as if it cradled a child. "Sure the Blessed Virgin's heard me prayers; I wonder would Mr. West mind if I walked home and took a little of the money he gave me for me cab to put up a candle to Her?"

"But it won't be an easy place," said Val, secretly wondering how much tenacity or stability of purpose underlay the ecstatic Irish fervor. "You'll be on the run all day. Mrs. Drew never spares herself or others. There's always more work to be done in the house than time to do it in, and you're not used, you pretty thing, to being at another woman's beck and call. And Harlesden, you don't know Harlesden; it's a dreary suburb. Rows and rows of small brick villas and an inordinate amount of fog. Too far out for you to get into the Parks——"

"I wouldn't want to get anywhere out of the nursery."

"But have you ever tried living in London? You're a country child, you don't know what it's like never to see a clean sun or a stretch of green grass——" Phyllida's hearty laugh was so scornful that Val's argument ran dry. So many men, so many minds: the prospect of living in Harlesden, which would have terrified Val, made no impression at all on Miss Browne, who had a kitten's preference of firesides to landscapes.

"So long as I can see to wash my face, that's all the sun I want," said Phyllida serenely. "What does it signify what it's like out of window? Ye needn't look. And indoors ye can do a great deal for next to nothing with casement cloth, and that's only one-and-nine a yard double width. But would she take me if she knew I was—that I'd lost me character?"

"She would on my recommendation," said Val, irrepressibly amused. Phyllida could not conceive what there was to laugh at, but she had already come to the conclusion that Miss Yarborough was one of those people who find much fun in things which are not intrinsically amusing.

"But she would be rather strict with you; I hope you wouldn't mind. It is her way; she's strict with herself, and with St. John, and with me too. I always tell her she makes people sit up without any biscuit on their nose. You would have to be down by eight o'clock, and never be late for meals, and never go out without permission, and never in any circumstances stay out alone after dark——"

"The way I wouldn't be getting into mischief," murmured Phyllida. She evidently thought it a very good thing.

"You wouldn't be cross?"

Phyllida opened her eyes. "No: why would I? I'd never expect her to trust me, or not for a long, long while. How could she know I mean to be good, when I've been so very, very bad?"

"Then there's the question of salary," resumed Val, not caring to pursue this topic, which made her heart ache. She no longer wondered that Aubrey West was sensitive for Phyllida. "The Drews are not well off, and Joanna can't afford to pay more than £20 a year. She might rise you to £21 after six months, but that depends on their exchequer, and she can't promise it."

"£20 a year? Oh, but that's very good pay, when I'm not trained, and I don't know anything of Englishy ways, and I'd be sure to want a lot of teaching. £20 a year with me board and lodging found—oh, I'd soon be able to save enough out of that to pay back Mr. West and Mr. Marquelay." Val did not imagine that West would allow himself to be repaid, or that Phyllida was in Marquelay's debt, but she approved of this spirit of independence which manifested itself under all Phyllida's trustful docility like an outcrop of granite among moor flowers. "Me papa wouldn't like me to take money from any one and not pay it back," explained Phyllida.

"Then you will decide to try Mrs. Drew." Yes, Val was her father's daughter; she showed it by the rapidity with

which she carried out a course of action as soon as it was planned. "Then what do you say to coming round with me now to call on her?" Phyllida gasped. "We can speak to Aubrey—Mr. West on our way down if he hasn't yet gone over to the Office, but he's sure to approve, because he rather likes the Drews." She glanced at her watch. "Then you shall sit for ten minutes in the winter garden while I change into civilized clothes, and that will just leave me time to run the car up to Harlesden before going on to Selwyn at the studio.—By-the-bye, I wonder when you can be ready to go to Mrs. Drew? She would be glad to take you on to-night, for there's a big bazaar coming off to-morrow, and it's inconvenient for her to be shorthanded. How long shall you take to pack?"

"Half an hour," said Phyllida,—"but I don't know if I wouldn't like to go home for just one more night if it were all the same to Mrs. Drew. I—I wouldn't like to seem ungrateful."

"To thank Mr. West? But you'll have plenty of chances of doing that." Val's smile was not so spontaneous as her smiles usually were. "The vicarage isn't a prison. You'll come and have tea with me in a day or so and tell me how you're getting on. We've settled to be friends, Phyllida, so I'm not going to lose sight of you, and no more is Mr. West." She took Phyllida's wistful face between her hands and kissed the pensive lips. Ah no! what man of West's years would be willing to lose sight of such a rosebud face? Val endured the asp-fang at her bosom. "My sweet, the sooner you're out of Vivian Street the better. But you shall see Mr. West again very soon, only I'd rather and he'd rather and I'm sure your papa would rather you saw him here."

"Oh very well," sighed Phyllida, docile, though still faintly reluctant. "Then I'd better go to-day if she'll have me when she sees me—and if ye're quite, quite sure I'll be able to thank Mr. West and Mr. Marqueray."

CHAPTER IX

Thus, pretty lady,
I am sorry for thy much misgovernment.

IT was on a Monday night that Phyllida first came to Vivian Street; three days later Val Yarborough carried her away to interview Mrs. Drew; the same morning she returned to pack her clothes and take an affectionate farewell of the Fieldens; and at tea time on Thursday afternoon a very demure, scared, and composed Miss Browne stood with all her worldly goods in the porch of St. Mark's Vicarage, Harlesden. There the new life instantly swallowed her up. Mrs. Drew's nurse was out, and ten minutes after Phyllida's arrival she was presiding over a nursery tea. She played with the children till bed-time, and the rest of the evening was passed in sewing tickets on late contributions to Mrs. Drew's bazaar. All Friday and Saturday Phyllida had not a minute to herself. On Sunday she was allowed to go to Mass and Benediction, and to her delight Aubrey West and Val and her brother Selwyn came in with other people to tea, but Phyllida had to slip away again to the nursery before they left, and she was disappointed that no one said anything of Mr. Marqueray. Was she never to see him any more? Apparently not. Phyllida thought of writing him a little note to express her gratitude, but she had not his address, and a perfectly vague shyness prevented her from asking Aubrey West for it.

Apart from this thorn Phyllida was not unhappy, for in a laconic, stern way Mrs. Drew was kind to her, and though the life was so novel, and so full of duties to be

done, that Phyllida went to bed tired out every night, she was rather glad of it than otherwise. When one has no future of one's own, one is thankful to attach oneself to other folks' interests. The active benevolence of St. Mark's Vicarage soothed Miss Browne, who hated to be idle and loved to feel that she was doing good. She soon began to throw out her tentacles in every direction, to Joanna Drew, to her tall, tired, boyish-looking husband, above all to little Timothy, who was only six months old and delicate. Sitting by the fire with Tim in her arms, crooning "The Wearing o' the Green" or "The Red Flag" (the tunes she knew best) in his unoffended ear, Phyllida tasted a sweeter peace than she had enjoyed since she left the blue hills of Mayo.

It was not such a narrow life, for the Drews, in spite of much doing good, were not narrow people. Joanna Drew came to Harlesden from Mayfair, though small trace of it was left in her black dresses and plain plaits. Her husband had been a fashionable preacher till she married him. When they agreed to make the great acceptance, giving up a good income and a Kensington residence to go out into the deserts of the North, not a few of their friends lingered on, and of a Sunday afternoon the conversation in Joanna's drawing-room ran to art and politics. George Mallinson dropped in now and then to talk over a new play with St. John Drew, Selwyn Yarborough to lie at Joanna's feet and sketch her on his cuff or the back of a visiting-card, Sally Hilder the actress to scandalize the parish with her remarkable foreign gowns and still more foreign songs. Joanna's impartial, stern good humor shone on all alike, but somehow or other her husband always drifted towards the younger men and the prettier women. Joanna Drew said in her solemn voice and without a smile, but not without the glimmer that Selwyn loved in her eyes, "The smell of fire has passed upon St. John. I snatched him from the

burning, but I never quite put him out." And he remains to this day a member of Your Club.

Among these kind and busy people Phyllida turned round and round like a cat on a cushion, till before long she had made a little hole for herself.

West was thankful to be quit of his responsibility, for every minute that Yarborough left free was given to South Cambs. Neither Robert Vere, nor Yarborough, nor West himself was given to letting grass grow under his feet, and within a few days the necessary arrangements were made, and West was formally adopted as the Ministerial candidate. It was currently reported that Deever could not live another fortnight. His brother, who would have liked to get the seat "on the cheap," consoled himself with the reflection that it would be cheaper not to sit at all. Yarborough, who had come to rely on West as a third hand and second memory, was irritable because his secretary was no longer at his beck and call for ten or twelve hours out of the twenty-four. And West, who had merged himself for six years in another man's career, began now to think seriously of his own. The change in his point of view was a fine but thorough permeation; it extended even now and then to his manner, and certainly it colored all his thoughts.

He got away for two days and stayed at a Cambridge inn to interview his committee men. Backed in the party by Yarborough and in the county by Robert Vere of Herold, he was sure of an official welcome, but to win the personal good will of his rank and file was slower work: and the less easy because while Deever lay slowly dying West felt the indecency of trying on his shoes. He did what he could: made a neat speech at a public dinner: shook hands with many people whom he had never seen before: and left on many minds, by his evident simplicity and sincerity, a deeper mark than he was aware of.

During this interval he met Marqueray again and again

in Wellwood Square or at a club, but nothing private passed between them except an interchange of notes.

"DEAR AUBREY,—

"£5 inclosed. Don't turn it down again.

"Yours, DAN M."

"DEAR MARQUERAY,—

"Thanks very much, I inclose a formal receipt. You will like to know that Miss Yarborough has found a place for your protégée with the wife of a North London vicar. She will be thoroughly well looked after, and I hope she will be happy.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. WYNN-WEST."

Marqueray smiled over this letter, the style of which amused him more than its contents, but his amusement did not last long, and he tore the receipt into sixteen pieces before throwing it into the fire. His features in those late October days began to be rather fine-drawn, and Robert Vere rallied him on getting thin. He had been for some time leading a dual life with all the energy at his command, and few men in London combined harder play with harder work. He did everything that could be done by a rich, idle man in the swing of an autumn season, but he would come in at three in the morning and work till five, sleep four hours and turn out again on horseback by ten. He had never lain long in bed, and at this time he took less rest than his body required.

Marqueray was at a period of change, and Vere misread him because Vere judged him by his younger nature, a nature, too, which had been bent by external forces of which Vere knew next to nothing. Marqueray had no near relations, and a rather lonely and neglected boyhood had prevented him from making friends till he was past the expansive age. He had been sent on his father's death to a private school, and there he stayed, term and vacation, till Vere, coming home after three years in Persia, was sur-

prised to find that George's son was growing up and ought to be at Eton. Vere's return transformed Marqueray's life, but some permanent mischief was already done, for, though Vere never knew it, during those years from twelve to fifteen Marqueray had suffered a good deal in a repressed impassive way. He would have died sooner than confess it. He was a self-contained youth and kept a stiff upper lip. But three years are a long while, and they left their mark in certain permanent disabilities and regrets. Later, the pleasures of his splendid manhood satisfied him, and he was glad to have no ties, which hamper a man's freedom and force him to think twice before risking his life. But he had a heart, and when his feelings were hurt he was unhappy, though he knew no way of saying so. He had a very warm affection for his uncle, and would have done anything on earth for Vere: and now and again—say once in ten times—it stung him to be misread. Recently he had gone far out of his way to court West, and West had met him with a stinging slap in the face, which left him sore, though he tried to laugh it off.

What Marqueray did think hard was that West had punished him for his frankness. Lying through the small hours still as the dead and wakeful as a soul in Hades, Marqueray reflected rather angrily upon the Christian practice of condemning a man not for a sin but for a temptation. Was it his fault if his nights were haunted? . . . Perhaps, to some extent; he was honest and owned to himself that he would have been less at the mercy of his impressions if there had been no other women in his life. But who expects a man of his class to rule himself like a monk? Not the Reverend James Spurling, with whom Marqueray had lived between twelve and fifteen: not Robert Vere, ascetic by temperament, libertine by creed. "Chastity, Dan,"—unforgettable the cool classic accent, on that one occasion when Marqueray at nineteen went to him for advice,—“is an effeminate virtue. But you must

use common sense." Dangerous doctrine to preach to a boy who was not at all ascetic and not at all prudent, and over whose conduct no motive lower than personal affection or pity or chivalry would ever have had any restraining influence! Luckily Vere's own life was spotless, and Marqueray admired it, and preferred it, as a model, to his sermons; and he had worked out for himself a creed which had at least the merit of being purer than any taught him by his pastors and masters. But what credit did he get for that from Aubrey West? None: and none for sticking to it when he was fretted almost into fever. For this passion which he denied himself was stronger than any of the light passions that he had gratified.

It was so strong that it led him into boyish follies. A fortnight after Phyllida left Vivian Street, on a foggy morning when the breath of frost was in the air, Marqueray got up after four hours' nominal sleep and went for a ride. In the Mall he met West, hurrying across from Park Lane to the Foreign Office, and Marqueray brought his mare to the rail. "Morning, Aubrey. Cares of the Empire on your shoulders, eh?" West smiled, and coaxed to the mare, who dropped her velvet nose into his palm. "How are you?" said Marqueray. "Recovered from your indisposition, I trust?"

"Oh! yes, thanks," said West carelessly. "Ta-ta, I must be off."

Marqueray leaned from his saddle. "How does Miss Browne get on with the vicar's wife?"

"Very well, I believe." West paused, trying in vain as usual to read Marqueray's face, which as usual expressed nothing but a sleepy good humor. West had scarcely given a second thought to what he had taken for the fleeting caprice of a spoilt man.

"Have you seen her since she went to Highgate?"

"Harlesden," corrected West; and as the name left his lips, he realized that he had been trapped. Marqueray

drew back laughing. "It is all right, I only wanted to know where she was. I am not going to worry her. But were you born to shine as a diplomat, Aubrey?"

"I was not on guard."

Marqueray reddened, feeling all that the laconic reproach implied. "If you want to disarm me, you should trust me."

It was an illuminating remark, and West's eyes softened. He would have said more, but the Mall at that hour was no place for a private interview, and a Treasury acquaintance came up and claimed him for the stroll across the Park.

And then Marqueray turned his mare and rode straight on into the Harrow Road. It would have been more sensible to change his clothes and get into a Metropolitan train, but if he had given himself time to think he would not have gone at all, and he wanted—oh, how he wanted to go! He meant no harm. He was not treacherous, and no thought of breaking his word to Aubrey crossed his mind. He was only going to look at the house Phyllida lived in and to take his chance of seeing her in the street. It was a boy's foolishness, but except for its utter folly there was nothing in it to be ashamed of. He was not even going to speak to her: and not only his promise to West curbed him, but his own secret tenderness and awe of her innocence: if he had seen her in the street he would have raised his hat and ridden on—and oh, how he longed to see her!

Marqueray had his wish. He was riding slowly through the crowded High Street when a small, swift electric brougham slipped round a turning and slid away down the London road. In it sat Phyllida, fresh and demure, and a very handsome young man of five- or six-and-twenty whose attitude and manner and thin brown face expressed his open admiration.

The mare began to fret, and Marqueray rode on slowly,

deep in thought. There might well be some natural explanation, though Phyllida was supposed to have no friends in town. At the vicarage gate he got off his horse and threw the reins to a loafer. "Is your mistress at home?" he said to the maid who opened the door. He sent in his card and was taken to a fireless drawing-room, where Joanna Drew came to him: a tall, grave woman with a white complexion and light gray eyes under a jutting brow.

Marqueray stood holding his gloves and hat in one hand and his switch in the other. He hoped that Mrs. Drew would forgive him for troubling her: he was a cousin of Aubrey West's, and had an errand to Mrs. Drew's companion.

"She went out five minutes ago," said Joanna Drew, regarding him gravely. Neither Harlesden nor Mayfair had inspired in her much faith in human nature.

"Walking? Perhaps I might overtake her."

"You would not; she went out on foot, but she was on her way to the Metropolitan station, and she is in the train by now."

"Alone?"

"Yes; why do you ask?"

Marqueray stood absolutely silent, drumming on his boot with his whip.

"If there is any message I could give her," said Mrs. Drew, "or if you would care to write a note——?"

"Was she going to see friends of her own?"

"No, she was doing an errand for me."

"Thank you," said Marqueray. He bowed to her and went out. Mrs. Drew was not a curious woman, but she stood at the window to watch him ride away.

When Phyllida came in, Mrs. Drew gave her Marqueray's card. Phyllida, in the act of taking off her hat, turned round, both hands at her veil—"O! and me not in. O! dear, I'm so sorry. I wonder why he came?"

It was a point upon which Mrs. Drew had her own ideas, but she kept them to herself. "I wonder you didn't meet him in the lane. Did you go direct to the station?"

"No," said Phyllida, folding her veil. "I didn't go in the train. Mr. Selwyn Yarborough met me in his motor-car. He was coming home from Wembley Park, so Miss Yarborough told him to call for me because of all me parcels." It is notorious that bazaars live by taking in one another's washing, and Phyllida's innocent errand had been to carry to Park Lane a collection of unsold wares for Val to buy and sell again. A simple explanation; but Marqueray could not hit on it because it hinged on one of those accumulations of the slightly unlikely which never fail to perplex though they happen every day.

"So he drove you up," said Mrs. Drew, looking thoughtfully at Phyllida. "That was a rather silly arrangement. It was not your fault if Miss Yarborough planned it, but in future I would rather you did not drive about alone with young men."

"I never thought of that," said Phyllida in dismay. "O! what a good thing Mr. Marqueray didn't see me. But," consoling herself, "ye can't call Mr. Selwyn a young man. He feels so *very* young, to me."

Mrs. Drew was a woman of few words who believed in giving spring plants room to grow, and that afternoon she made no demur when Phyllida said she should like to go to the National Gallery. Mrs. Drew had promised Phyllida a half-holiday every Friday, and she would have called it spiritual cowardice to break her word. Souls, like bodies, are not trained by coddling. She therefore let Phyllida go with a laconic warning—"Don't stay out after dark, Miss Browne, and if any man speaks to you in the street, go directly to a policeman. You need not make any complaint. Just ask him what o'clock it is, or the way to Victoria Station." Unfortunately Phyllida never dreamed of applying this rule to Marqueray, who overtook her in

the High Street. After going home to change, he had returned to sit for an hour in a fly-blown confectioner's shop at the corner of the vicarage lane, and he followed Phyllida and fell into step by her so quietly that she never saw him till he touched her arm. She gave a great start then, and her face lit up, radiant and sparkling as if the dawn had risen on her. "O Mr. Marqueray, 'tis you! I thought I was never going to see you any more!"

CHAPTER X

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame.

“**D**ID you?” said Marqueray, taking off his glove to shake hands with her. “And were you sorry? Ma’am, you do me too much honor. Why are you out of bounds at this time of day? Mrs. Drew hasn’t sacked you already, has she?”

“ ’Tis me half-holiday,” Phyllida explained demurely, withdrawing her hand, which Marqueray seemed to like holding.

“Oh, ah: you have a day out once a week, don’t you? Like a housemaid. That’s very nice, because I also have a half-holiday.” He smiled at her, his teeth mulatto-white against his dark, brick-colored skin. “You’re not going to see Mr. West or Miss Yarborough, are you?” Phyllida, not wishing to refer to her regrettable drive with Selwyn, contented herself with a simple negative. “Or any other young friend?”

“Ye know I haven’t any other friends, Mr. Marqueray.”

“Oh, haven’t you?—Come and have tea with me, then.”

Phyllida hesitated. Had it been West she would have gone with him like a child, but instinct warned her that Marqueray was not so safe as West. But why? She did not know. She was an adept at putting two and two together without making four, and even now she saw no connection between Marqueray’s morning visit in breeches and boots and his reappearance in afternoon dress. She supposed he had business in Harlesden. She was too ignorant of London to know that a man like Marqueray never has business in a suburb like Harlesden. She had abso-

lutely no defense except instinct, for what she called "me common sense" took Marqueray's part. To refuse would be ungrateful, fanciful, rude, even vain: she was only a little girl, while Mr. Marqueray was a middle-aged man: and after all, what pretext had she for refusing? "Sure if he gave me me clothes, he may as well give me me tea!"

Phyllida had had one horrible experience of mankind. It should have taught her caution. It had not, in fact, taught her anything at all. Instinct apart,—and her instinct was blind and mute, while her reason rebuked it,—no shadow of definite danger fell across her mind. Like West, she was not on guard.

"I'd love to," she said meekly, "if ye think it would be right for me."

Marqueray smiled to himself. They were all alike, these pretty women, sisters under their skins: he knew more of Eastern than of Western women, but the East gave him a clew to the West, for in her trick of slipping out of moral responsibility this little Phyllida Marchmont was a pure Oriental. He carried his smile down into Phyllida's eyes, and its effect was too mocking to be wholly pleasant.

A cab was passing (Marqueray had hired it an hour ago), and he made Phyllida get in: he did not care to be seen walking with Miss Browne in her modest little gray dress, but reclining in her corner, not much visible of her except her Greuze head and fur cap daintily veiled, she might pass, for a hurried glimpse. They were borne merrily along; the pace, the hum of the engine, the inspiring breath of autumn air brought her rose-bloom to Phyllida's cheeks. Marqueray felt that he could resign himself to being seen if he had to be seen, though he did not care to court observation. "Where are we going to?" said Phyllida.

"Where would you care to go? I'm at your service." He had given the driver his direction beforehand and had

no intention of departing from it. Their route was mapped out street by street.

"I was going to see the paintings at the National Gallery; but perhaps ye've seen them already?"

"Trafalgar Square be it. Stop a bit." He drew back. "Can't be done, I'm afraid. Thursday is Students' Day. Didn't Mrs. Drew warn you?—Oh no, you wouldn't like it at all," said Marqueray vaguely. "Fearful, long-haired crowd. Wherever else you like, but not there, for your own sake."

"Oh! well then anywhere, I don't care a bit. London's a stately city, and ye know it better than I do. Ye choose for me." She smiled serenely at him like a happy child. "I'm so sorry I was out this morning. Ye were riding, Mrs. Drew said, ye had a lovely black mare. 'Tisn't so very safe for you to be riding in these narrow streets; I wouldn't care for it meself and I'm used to Irish horses."

"Oh, you can ride, can you? Shouldn't you like a black mare of your own?"

She laughed. "Me riding days are over. Me present occupation is to earn me own living. Not that I am earning me living when I'm over head and ears in debt and all the money I have is thirty shillings Mr. West gave me——"

"Thirty shillings!" said Marqueray, amused. "Is that all? Economical Aubrey!"

"'Tis not all he offered me, 'tis all I would take." Phylida was once more the rumped kitten. It was odd how often she got indignant with Marqueray. "I won't want more than that for me washing and me chair in church." Marqueray stared at her with his blank blue eyes. She was always adorable, in her stupidity, in her solicitude, but when she drew herself up and frowned at him she ravished him to such an extent that he could hardly wait till they were alone before taking her in his arms. "'Tis bad enough already. But I'm going to be very respectful and

punctual and industrious,"—Marqueray grinned like a handsome, copper-colored Satan,—“and then I’ll soon save enough to pay you back.”

“I hope you’ll do nothing of the sort. I should hate to think of your becoming sober and industrious, and I should be still more annoyed if you were ever to offer to pay me back.” Under shelter of a rug Marqueray put his large hand over hers, which was small enough to be completely swallowed up in his heavy clasp. “Pay West if you like, but please don’t pay me, Phyllida. I love to think you’re in my debt.” He felt her heart fluttering in her wrist, the weak, fine wrist, pearly, and dimpled like a baby’s. “It’s the tiniest trifle, not worth mentioning between friends. If you ever offered to pay me, I should think I’d done something to annoy you. Don’t you know that money can’t pass between friends?”

“Mr. Marqueray, you’re holding my hand.”

Marqueray released it. He was practiced in going slow. But he had never felt anything like the emotion that surged up in him when Phyllida’s wrist fluttered under his palm. He threw himself back, but he was sitting sideways, and though he no longer held her, his glance enveloped her from head to foot, cold, brilliant, libertine. Phyllida fidgeted.

“Mr. Marqueray, ye’re watching me.”

“Am I?” He turned his head. “London is full to-day. Look at the pretty shops! Shall we go in and buy dresses and furs and diamond necklaces? I believe I have my check-book with me. Don’t you think it would be great fun? I do. I should love to buy you a dozen dresses.”

“Ye are silly. . . .” Men are often silly, especially when they make jokes, but Phyllida felt a little less firmly convinced than she had been ten minutes ago that instincts which can give no account of themselves ought not to be allowed to determine a wise woman’s actions. Marqueray saw her distress, and for more than one reason changed the conversation.

"No more shops now: I brought you this way to show you the haunts of the aristocracy. Aren't they dismal? Harlesden is much jollier.—Here is Grosvenor Square, where all the dukes live——"

"Grosvenor Square? Did ye say Grosvenor Square?"

Phyllida sat up electrified, gazing at the high Augustan buildings with more eagerness than was warranted by their architectural pretensions. Marqueray dropped his eyelids. "Yes: do you know any one living in Grosvenor Square?"

"I did once." She craned her head to read the numbers. "27, 28—oh, these are too low—oh, Mr. Marqueray——!"

"Here are the higher numbers," said Marqueray. He signaled to the driver to go slowly along the southern front of the square. Midway, before an immense Jacobean portico, a very large and expensive-looking limousine stood drawn up to the pavement, and as they neared it the doors were flung open and the master of the house came out, a bleached, effeminate man, tucking a gold-topped cane under his arm and drawing on a pair of lemon-colored gloves. He glanced up into the crawling taxi-cab and saw Phyllida. From white he turned to a sickly yellow, and reeled and clutched at a footman's arm. Marqueray with his hard, jeering smile put up a finger to his hat. But he suspected that Marchmont had eyes for Phyllida alone.

"Did you see that curry-colored maggot on the pavement?" he asked, picking up the communication tube to bid the cabman drive on. "That was Lord Marchmont, the Jew millionaire. He doesn't love me very much, but one of these days he is going to love me still less."

"What—what d'ye mean?"

"I am going to flog him into ribbons," said Marqueray. Then, collecting himself, and shocked at his own coarseness, for he saw that he had terrified Phyllida, "So sorry; I don't generally speak of these things beforehand, or to a lady." Nor did he; but he had never felt jealous before.

He took off his hat and turned his face to the wind. "Never mind, we won't talk about him any more, and I dare say I shall never lay a finger on him in the end. . . . We now come to Piccadilly, which is another very noble thoroughfare. On our right is the Ritz, where I'm going to take you to dinner one of these days. On our left is—is my uncle, by Jove!" He bowed to Vere, whose eyes never missed any figure on the most crowded stage. Their expression as they ranged over Dan and Dan's companion was mildly and decorously amused. "This is the Park. . . ." He ran on, giving Phyllida time to recover herself, till the cab turned down out of the Mall. "And here we are at Whitehall Court, and time enough, too. You look pale, Miss Browne, you want some tea." He sprang out and offered his hand to Phyllida. But she hung back.

"This isn't an A B C shop—where are ye taking me?"

"To my rooms. Much more comfortable than a tea shop and besides," Marqueray dropped his voice, always soft, "I don't know that West would care for you to have tea with me in a restaurant. But here, in my own quarters, we shall be as private and as proper as you were in Vivian Street."

Phyllida meekly preceded him into the lift. She was still distressed and uncomfortable, but the reference to West was a subtle touch and went far to soothe her. Weren't the cases parallel? and wouldn't it be unkind and ungrateful and self-consequential to make a fuss about doing with Mr. Marqueray what she had done with Mr. West? As he stood propped against the wall of the lift, his fine, straight profile turned from her and the inevitable faint smile on his lips, Phyllida felt a warm glow of trustful tenderness rising up in her heart and a great inclination to do whatever Mr. Marqueray wished. Sure he would take care of her; he was too strong to be cruel to a little thing like her. They alighted on the first floor, and when

the soft thud of double doors closed behind them, they were alone in Marqueray's private suite of rooms. Banks was enjoying an evening's holiday. He had been directed before he left to lay tea for two, and he had done it with nicety and discrimination, and had smirked to himself over doing it. Mr. Marqueray had been more than usually precise in his orders about cakes and bonbons and flowers. Details which in previous teas for two had been left to Banks' discretion, had been settled this time by Mr. Marqueray himself.

Phyllida gave a little cry of delight when she entered Marqueray's sitting-room. Neither Ireland, nor her Italian journey, nor—least of all—Vivian Street had prepared her for Marqueray's carefully designed interior. It was very large, and the scheme of coloring throughout was a pale shade of amber. On the paneled walls a few large pictures hung widely spaced out. Curtains of a very beautiful and uncommon Indian stuff in brown and silver fell in folds on either side of the tall windows, which stood open, overlooking a reach of the sunlit Thames. The parquet floor was bare but for a magnificent black panther skin thrown down before the blazing hearth—a solitary splash of gloom amid vague tones of honey and brown and gold. Flowers—another note of dissidence, for Marqueray had chosen sweet peas in every shade of mauve—ran riot in Sèvres vases and over a bronze trellis near the window, so that their breath flowed in and out with every movement of the wind. An oval table of olivewood carried a tray set with fairy cups of Sèvres, and near by stood two or three gilt baskets full of sweetmeats almost too pretty to be eaten. Fruit was heaped in a golden bowl. Half hidden by the fall of a curtain, Rodin's bronze lover bent over a woman whose lips were lifted to his own in an immortal kiss.

"Ye've had tea laid for two!" said Phyllida.

"Yes, isn't it a good thing?" said Marqueray. "I'll make it and you shall pour it out: how's that for a division of labor?"

Phyllida sat down on a mauve cushion in a gilt chair and watched him make the tea. Secretly she thought him rather pernickety over it. You put the tea in the pot and poured hot water on it, and there you were. She had never seen Thady warm the pot first, or measure the leaves with such a sparing and precise hand. She couldn't see but what Mr. Marqueray's tea was going to be very weak.

"How do you like my rooms?" said Marqueray.

"'Tis lovely," said Phyllida, her eyes traveling uneasily to the bronze lovers. Her artistic training had not gone far in Italy, not indeed for want of cultivation, but because Phyllida did not take kindly to the art that had attracted the companion of her Italian journeys. He had given her up in despair when after a month's docility she darted upon a Venetian shop which catered for English tastes, and pointed with an unrelenting forefinger to—Ah well, to a thoroughly draped medieval beauty raising her devoted eyes to one who could never be taken for less than her legal lord. "I like that," had said Phyllida. "She's such pretty clothes on."

Marqueray followed the direction of her glance and believed that he followed her thoughts as readily. They were all alike, these pretty women of the Oriental type: all interested in a side of life in which conventionally women are not supposed to be interested, and all ashamed of confessing to it. He half hoped that Phyllida, a child of nature, would be bold or stupid enough to be frank. It would be more amusing if she were less like all the others. He strolled across the room and held the curtain back.

"Aren't they a pretty pair?" he said. "Don't you like them, Phyllida?"

Phyllida hesitated; she did not wish to wound his feelings, and she had learned—it had been taught to her in

detail—that the male standard is not and ought not to be that of a woman. “I—I think not just at tea time,” she faltered. It was the best she could do.

Marqueray let the curtain fall and turned round to stare at her. What struck him was not the simplicity or apparent candor of her reply so much as its childishness. What a baby thing it was, sitting up on its cushion so deprecating and so unafraid, like a downy fledgeling that had tumbled out of the nest! Imagination held up a mirror of his own conduct which made him feel sick with disgust. What the devil was he doing with the child? What of her delicate reticence would be left to her in an hour’s time?—What would West say?—But when he recalled the incidents of Grosvenor Square and of Harlesden, his eyes hardened. This flowerlike Phyllida had been Marchmont’s mistress for the better part of a twelvemonth, and had already entered into private relations with another man.

“Give me some tea, Phyllida. Aren’t you thirsty? I am.”

“It hasn’t stood so very long yet,” said Phyllida doubtfully. “And ye didn’t put much in. It’ll be as weak as weak.”

But as Marqueray stretched out his hand for a cup, she gave it him, and the fragrance of the superfine scented stuff, which came in a sealed crate direct from a Chinese plantation, was diffused throughout the room. Marqueray retired with it to an immense, softly cushioned divan and threw himself down on one arm, an attitude which Phyllida had been brought up to consider discourteous before a lady. Recklessly he was shocking all her instinctive sensibilities—but she had a young and healthy appetite, and Mrs. Drew’s roast and boiled, pudding and pie, though satisfying to her hunger, left a regret in her taste. When she fell upon Marqueray’s bonbons, she forgot his silent, brooding presence in the room. Marqueray watched her and watched her. Ten minutes ago he had not known how

to wait, but seduction can be uphill work, and now that she was in his power he dallied with the bittersweet of unsatisfied desire. More than any other woman before her she charmed his fancy; every aspect was refined, every movement harmonious in its young grace. Almost he thought he could be satisfied with watching her.

The Thames was running gold under a windy golden sunset, it glowed burnished from the western splendor, sepia dark under the shade of Westminster, fretted in iridescent ripples towards Tower Bridge and the smoke of shipping in the Pool. "Ye've a lovely view over the river," said Phyllida, wiping a trace of sugar from her lips, upon the reflection that it is a guest's duty to make conversation and not to devote herself exclusively to eating bonbons.

"Very pretty," said Marqueray absently. "... Tell me how you get on at Harlesden."

"Oh! pretty well." Phyllida stood up to shake the crumbs from her lap on the tray. "I sew, and I nurse Timmy, that's the wee boy, and I run errands for Mrs. Drew: and I sold buttonholes at the bazaar. They were a shilling and sixpence, and I made £13 9s. 5d. Some went cheap when they weren't so very fresh." Phyllida was always precise over figures. They frightened her. "Miss Yarborough said it was good. But, dear me! ye can always get a man to buy a buttonhole," pursued Miss Browne artlessly. "'Tis just the way ye look at them, as if ye were sorry to trouble them and yet ye were sure they wouldn't mind."

"Delilah!" said Marqueray, laughing. "Don't tell me any more." He moved restlessly on his cushions. If she was not innocent, there were no innocent women on earth.—She had been Marchmont's mistress, and was perhaps already the mistress of a second lover. The name of Val Yarborough gave a fillip to his temper. She liked him, but he did not much like her: she stood for certain forces of modern life which are inimical to certain older male prero-

gatives, such as the hawk's right to strike his prey. She would not have let Phyllida come to his rooms.

Marqueray got up and set his empty cup down on the tray. "No, no more," he said, smiling. "*Déjà tu m'as versé du poison.*" He remained standing by the table, and his proximity affected Phyllida to the verge of distress. Wasn't it time to go?—Phaeton in his gilt chariot over the hearth proclaimed that it was nearly five o'clock, and she gathered up her gloves.

"Oh, don't go yet! You've only just come. What an ungrateful child you are!"

"'Deed I'm not!" Phyllida flushed scarlet. "I'm grateful every minute every day!"

"I didn't mean that," said Marqueray, disconcerted. "I only meant that it isn't proper manners to run away directly after tea. What a sweep you must think me to be always reminding you of that! I wish you would forget about it. Or perhaps your safest plan would be to compound with your creditors: what is the extent of the obligation?"

She had some dim idea that he was teasing her, but her natural inclination was to take speech literally. "Mrs. Fielden said it came to about £10 for me clothes, and besides that there's the thirty shillings Mr. West gave me when I came away. Half eleven pounds ten is five pounds fifteen, isn't it? But then there would be quite another five shillings that he prepaid for me cab."

"Vast sums of money, in short," said Marqueray. He sat down at his bureau and wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper.

Oct. 23, 19—.

"Received from Miss Phyllida Browne

"the sum of five pounds seventeen and sixpence.

£5 17s. 6d.

"with many thanks.

"G. DANVERS MARQUERAY."

"But what'll I do with this? I can't pay you for ever so long, and perhaps by then it'll be ever so much more."

"Pay me now," said Marqueray, putting his arm round her waist. Phyllida uttered a little wailing cry, escaped, and flew past him to a door. Marqueray made no attempt to follow her. On the open threshold she stopped. She was lint white when she turned round, and her legs seemed to be giving way under her.

"Wrong way, eh?" said Marqueray. "Try this one instead." He opened the other door into the passage and stood back, leaving her an unimpeded exit. Phyllida crept across the room and went out.

After a moment Marqueray followed her.

"Don't run away from me in such a hurry. Come back and get your gloves and your breath. You're as safe with me as ever you were in your life. There's nothing—nothing on earth to be afraid of."

"There's you," said Phyllida, panting and supporting herself against the wall.

"Well, and if there is, I'm not Marchmont."

"Not——?"

"Marchmont. You went to Italy with Marchmont, didn't you?"

"Me head feels queer," said Phyllida.

She raised her hand to her forehead. Marqueray made a movement, but she shrank from him in such an agony that he had not the heart to touch her. "I mustn't faint," she said aloud. "Not now. I must go away first."

"You can go away whenever you like," said Marqueray patiently. He had not bargained for a scene of this sort. In his relations with women he had been occasionally pitiless but never brutal, and between him and Marchmont the gulf was wider than between him and West. He saw that for that evening he could do nothing more with Phyllida, and the scales between passion and pity hung so evenly balanced that for the moment he had ceased to

desire any more of her. The hawk had missed his stoop. Why? He could not imagine: he was sure that he was not personally repulsive to Phyllida, nor did he in his sane mind believe that she had yet given herself to another lover. She had been playing with fire, no doubt; she was a little sinner, but not so bad as that. It might be that Marqueray had been overshot by the handsome boy at Harlesden, but his hardy male pride refused to believe it. Far more likely that he had struck too soon and that Phyllida was not yet sufficiently recovered from the shock of her first intrigue to be ready for a second. The truth—that she was spotlessly innocent and frightened of the very name of sin—never crossed his mind at all.

He drew back. "You have only to open the door at the end of this passage and ring for the lift. I give you my word I won't touch you. I should like to remind you that I haven't touched you so far except to ask you for a kiss."

"Ye talk," said Phyllida.

He went back to fetch her gloves and handkerchief. "Forgive the apparent discourtesy." He tossed them from the threshold to her feet. Phyllida stooped to pick them up, but she kept her frightened eyes on Marqueray all the while. She was lint white still, and apparently she had not strength to walk as far as the door. Marqueray's predominant thought was that if she went out of his rooms and fainted in the lift or at the porch, there might be inconvenient gossip, or even, possibly, inconvenient inquiries. But there was an undercurrent running in his mind, a sentiment, or passion, or instinct, which had not yet shaped itself in mental words: it had no name, nothing but an embryonic existence: challenged, he would have denied that it existed at all; and yet, since these deep, hidden forces in a man's life are often stronger than reason, he found himself doing what it constrained him to do and what he had never done before. He went up to Phyllida,

dropped on one knee, and raised her hands to his lips.

"I swear you are safe with me, my darling. I will not hurt you."

"Not if I were to faint?"

"Good God, no! Have I deserved that?"

Phyllida drew a deep breath. It was strange to be looking down on Mr. Marqueray instead of up at him. . . . His hair was really red, and how straight his parting was! Of all ungrateful girls in the world——! If it had been the canary—no, curry-colored maggot, she couldn't have had more awful thoughts of him!

"Oh, I'm sorry, if I hurt you, Mr. Marqueray." She drew her hands slowly and lingeringly out of his clasp. They fluttered over him, feeling a great inclination to caress him. "Ye just must forgive me, for I'm very sorry. 'Twas being so afraid o' fainting made me think I was going to faint. Sure I ought to have known better! But I get frightened quickly now. Stand up, then; think if any one was to see you!" Marqueray drew himself lightly to his feet. "Let me go away then, I'm quite better now," Phyllida murmured in a small, flat voice. She had not felt such a silly girl since she was fifteen and upset her tea over Norah Barry's jacket. Marqueray followed her along the corridor—not too close. But at the door she turned half round towards him, looking up at him under her eyelashes. "Ye aren't too cross with me?"

Scilicet, for misunderstanding an innocent paternal sentiment. But Marqueray, whose head was spinning, missed the point. "It is good of you to forgive me."

"Forgive is it?" Through the silken fringe glimmered the inextinguishable Celtic sparkle. "Sure 'twas nothing but a kiss—and ye never took it after all!"

Marqueray would have been wiser than a man if he had not read this for a challenge. That he did not immediately act on it was due to the extraordinary conflict of ideas which it roused in him. This—this was the little lady at

whose feet he had knelt! His cold cynic judgment brought its lash down on his shoulders. Decidedly Robert Vere was right, and the man who took a woman seriously became a woman's fool. But with this profound and jeering anger there came on him a pain as profound, so vital that it seemed to stop the beating of his heart. He had never felt anything like it before, and he did not know what it was, but it paralyzed him, and saved Phyllida. She opened the door for herself and slipped through, and a manservant in waiting hurried forward to ring for the lift. The last impression that Marqueray received was of the confused and haunting sweetness of her farewell smile.

Night was coming down on the glossy river. Marqueray went back to his room and sat for an hour, motionless, his head bent on his hand, in the chair from which Phyllida had risen and which still seemed to retain some perfume of her ghost.

CHAPTER XI

"If the wars eat us not up, the patricians will; and there's all the love they bear us."

TOWARDS seven o'clock the company of Marqueray's own thoughts became too bitter to be borne, and he got up and went out, not staying to change his clothes. He meant to get dinner at some quiet restaurant where he would not meet any one he knew or be obliged to make conversation. It was quite dark when he came up into Whitehall, that is to say quite light, but with the light of London's many midnight suns; the unending dual current of the pavement, the trampling of innumerable feet, the flitting by of innumerable faces, each a pale disk instinct with its private hopes and fears, gave relief to his mood. He crossed Trafalgar Square and had just turned into the Strand, when a car pulled up to the curb ahead of him, and as he came abreast of it a lady leaned forward and raised her hand. A lady alone: so his evening was after all not to pass without adventure?—It was not, but the adventure was to belong to no class that he could have foreseen. As he took off his hat and drew up to the door of the landaulette, he recognized with astonishment, under an alluring, trim French hat and plume and dark veil, the merry eyes of Val Yarborough.

"It is you, Mr. Marqueray? I'm so glad. Are you doing anything to-night?"

"I'm absolutely at your service," said Marqueray. But he did not know whether to stand or fly; what could Val want of him, unless by any odd chance she had come

into recent touch with Miss Browne?—an insupportable prospect!

“I wonder whether you would be so very kind as to escort me to the big political show in Mile End to-night?” Marqueray in his relief would have escorted her through a squadron of cavalry. “Mr. West is speaking, as I dare say you know, and I’ve taken a whim into my head to go and hear him. Have you ever heard him?”

“Never. I shall be delighted. It is exceedingly good of you to give me the chance.”

“Catching sight of you in this unexpected way, I acted on impulse,” said Val with a cool, unflurried laugh. She made room for Marqueray to sit by her. He got in, but he was frankly puzzled, and unable to see what part he was to play in the evening’s entertainment, for surely Yarborough’s daughter and the mistress of his house was capable of taking herself to a political meeting? Val divined his wonder. “But you would like to know why I had such an impulse?” She turned to him with the unrevealing candor which is safer than deception. “As I don’t think you will get out of the car if I tell you the truth, I don’t mind telling you. My father has gone to support Aubrey, and I feel rather nervous about him. So silly of me, isn’t it? I’m not nervous as a rule, but a man from Scotland Yard came in five minutes after they left to let us know that there was likely to be trouble to-night. The Chief likes to be warned beforehand, but the information only came through an hour ago, and the Yard people missed him because he went early. They took it seriously. Mile End is a rowdy neighborhood, and some of the big meetings lately have been rather badly wrecked. With the Yard on the alert I don’t suppose anything will come of it, but one can’t help remembering those unlucky Labor men last week—you saw it in the papers? They were believed to have let the strikers down, and there was a tremendous row; they had to be hustled off the platform by

a back way, and one of them didn't get out quickly enough and had his arm broken and half his clothes torn off——”

“Your father,” Dan remarked, “is not a Labor member, and I can't see either him or West getting hustled.”

“My father is bitterly unpopular with certain classes,” said Val slowly. “Oh, I'm glad of it! They hate him because he hates them, and I love a good hater. I love a No-Compromise motto.” Marqueray preserved silence, comparing this view of Yarborough with the opportunist drawn by Robert Vere. “But the flesh is weak, and I can't bear his running into danger.—What? Oh no, Mile End has no malice in it. I'm not afraid of genuine Mile End. But there may be imported trouble, hired roughs with big money at their backs. It is the capitalists who mean mischief, the men behind the markets who don't care what happens so long as they can buy cheap and sell dear. These new trade treaties——”

Marqueray gave a perceptible start. “I beg your pardon, but is that what the show is about to-night?”

“Yes—didn't you know? I thought you would have seen it in the paper.”

“I haven't read a paper to-day.”

“Not read a paper?” Val repeated, as palpably surprised as good breeding allowed.

“I believe not,” said Marqueray, smiling. “But don't scorn me, I do skim the *Morning Post* as a rule.” He had not even opened his letters. Val felt a touch of effort under his bantering manner, and concluded with her father's cynicism that Marqueray had been guilty of a night about town. “So that is the subject of debate. H'm . . . I wonder who sent the warning.”

“It is your cousin's meeting. He's written some rather brilliant articles lately in a financial review, and the local Liberal association asked him to come and explain his attitude. He said he would and he will,” Val sighed. “He never tempers the wind. They'll be very angry, for

they believe that the boycott is keeping prices up, and that the rich are using the poor as a stick to beat the Germans with, but Aubrey won't care a rap. He is so pugnacious on a platform! He is like my father who always says, 'Threatened men live long.' "

"Has he been threatened, then?" said Marqueray carelessly.

"Oh! I won't weary you with details as you aren't a politician." Val's eyes were faintly quizzical. She was practiced in fending off the curiosity that goes masked as indiscretion. "I only hope you aren't annoyed with me for pressing you into such a dangerous service. My brother Selwyn flatly refused to come. He said that when you hit a man you may sprain your thumb, and then you can't paint."

"Good for him," said Marqueray, laughing. "But we shall be safe enough on the platform."

"Oh, I'm not going on the platform," Val explained. "The Chief hates to be surprised at the last moment. I shall sit among the crowd. I know the hall; I went there with Mr. West last autumn, and it's a huge place; my father will never see me."

"But look here," said Marqueray, a fresh point of view striking him, "on second thoughts, I am very much annoyed! I haven't the pleasure of knowing your brother, but I feel sure that when he refused to go with you, he said you weren't to go at all. I've a great mind to take you straight home. What on earth would he say to me if I let you in for a scrimmage?"

"Victorian!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"The sheltered life," murmured Val. She was seized with a fit of laughter. "Oh, how charming of you! Yes, do take me home."

Marqueray did not much mind being laughed at, but he felt inclined to make one observation. "Men, Miss Yar-

borough, are all Victorian at heart. If by any odd chance you were to get hurt, your father would forbid me the house; and what would West say?"

He scored. Val's dark little face flamed. She was too ready-witted to betray herself for more than a moment, but in that moment Marqueray had seen and made a mental note of all there was to see. So she was interested in Aubrey, was she? Marqueray was glad of it; he was tender of Aubrey's feelings, and Aubrey's disappointment would have made him unhappy. He could not imagine why Aubrey or any man should want to marry her, but as a comrade he recognized in her a strain of hardihood which in a negative way was as tough as his own. He hated taking a lady where it was possible that he would be unable to protect her. Yet he remembered other women who had not required protection and with whom he had worked as a good comrade; his memories of them were kindly, and in some dim way Val reminded him of them. She looked as if she were made of the same metal, though she had not received the same hammering.

Val apart, there was nothing he would have liked better than a fight, to rid him of the painful, haunting impression that Phyllida had left on him. In a mood of storm, Marqueray was uncivilized enough to like fighting. He ruled his temper with a rod of iron, but only by an effort, and it would have been a relief to let himself go. But he could not flatter himself that Mile End would come up to the scratch.

When they reached the hall, however, he began to hope for the best. Large enough to hold two or three thousand people, it was packed from end to end: he had wondered whether his own lithe height and bronze head would escape West's eye, but when he sat down by Val at the rear he had no fear of being seen. In those dense ranks of men and women—the majority were men—it would have taken an opera glass to pick out any single face. The platform,

a long way off, was indistinct, for the haze of an autumn fog had got into the air, and the lights were turned low—stupidly low, Marqueray thought: a false economy: there is nothing like a low light to provoke a rowdy element. Behind the platform rose up tier beyond tier of orchestra seats, and above them the gilt pipes of a great organ, wreathed in democratic banners; and the strain which crashed out of it and which was cordially taken up by the audience was "The Red Flag." An equivocal welcome for a Cabinet Minister!

Marqueray, an old campaigner, would have preferred a seat next the gangway, but there was none vacant, and he was obliged to follow Val into the middle of a row of thirty or forty chairs. Her next neighbor was a costermonger in working dress, Marqueray's might have been a docker or a navvy; good-natured to a lady, for they moved apart to let Marqueray and Val sit together, but none too civil to the toff. Marqueray was not pleased. He hated the jostling of a dirty crowd. He was half relieved and half vexed to find Val indifferent to it, and full of unaffected interest in her surroundings; she had been to scores of political meetings, and this was not the first that had opened with a threat of storm. In fact she began talking to the costermonger, from whom she was presently able to impart to Marqueray a good deal of secondhand information.

"He has been telling me who all the people are on the platform," she explained. "The man with the big gray beard is Sewell, the Chairman; he's very well known in Mile End, keeps one of the big grocers' shops in Mile End Road. Next to him is Sir Roger Dane, the Member. I like him. The little personage with the waxed mustache is the president; he was to have taken the chair, but he's had an attack of asthma, and his voice is gone. Rather a scratch team, aren't they? It's supposed to be a non-party meeting, but my friend says the platform are all on

one side and the body of the hall on the other. The platform stand for the respectable classes. He thinks it's a pity they couldn't get any one to represent the Socialist lot. He's a Socialist himself, but not a Syndicalist. He's a most intelligent man. He says old Yarborough's good enough for him!"

"Did you tell him you were Mr. Yarborough's daughter?"

"Oh no, I didn't, but I will," said Val, mischievously innocent.

"No, don't," said Marqueray earnestly.

"Why not?"

"Never mind why. Please don't."

Age had given Val freedom from childishness. "Very well, if you say so; but Aubrey would tell us that that spirit of class mistrust is a great pity and a great danger." She glanced at her watch. "Five minutes to eight. How full it is! We shouldn't have got a seat if we hadn't come early. Oh, there is my father! Will they cheer him?"

Yarborough came up from a staircase behind the platform. He was cheered, but in a perfunctory way, and there were some catcalls and hooting mixed with the applause. Still, the opposition so far was slight; it was little more than the genial rowdiness inseparable from such a gathering in such a district. It moved Yarborough about as much as the buzzing of a fly; in fact Marqueray thought he looked as if he liked it. He bowed in acknowledgment of his friends, and glanced all over the hall with a little jeering, good-humored smile on his lips before he sat down. A minute later Aubrey West slipped quietly to his chair behind that of his Chief—so quietly that his appearance drew neither cheers nor hisses, for few in the audience knew him by sight. A clock under the gallery struck the hour, and the grocer-chairman rose to say the inevitable few words.

During his address and the much briefer speech with

which Sir Roger Dane opened the subject of debate, the crowd sat quiet. Marqueray, who knew more of foreign than of English riots, was puzzled. Perhaps after all the trouble would simmer down? They were evidently friendly to the local men, West was little known, Yarborough, who was to speak fourth, had always been the idol of the working classes, and was famous for his magical knack of handling a hostile mob; and the foreign trade treaties were a dry topic. Who is going to fight for statistics?

Then Dane sat down and Aubrey West strolled forward. He was in morning dress like the other men, and in manner the most simple and unassuming of them all: a slight, almost boyish figure, as he stood well to the front of the platform, leaning one hand behind him on the table while the other fidgeted with the cord of his eyeglass. A more inoffensive aspect no orator could have worn, and from his first few sentences, hesitating and slow, Marqueray was dismayed to find that he was nervous; he made a slip and corrected himself, made another slip and stammered over the second correction. Marqueray began to feel nervous, too. There is nothing more trying than to hear a friend break down. He shot a glance at Valentine Yarborough and found her smiling to herself, a little reminiscent smile, subtle, and touched with tenderness and pride. The "Will he pull through?" on Marqueray's lips died unuttered. Clearly, Val, who had heard West speak many times before, was not nervous for him, or not in that way. And meanwhile West had shaken himself petulantly free of his tangle—"You know what I *mean*—" and was running on more fluently, very natural, very simple, as Vere had said, not making a set speech at all, but talking to his audience, telling them with whom these proposals had originated and how they had been put into shape and why in his own opinion they were useful: talking perhaps after his usual practice to "the nearest intelligent head," yet sending all the same his effortless limpid tones down into

the dimmest corners of the hall and up into the reporters' gallery, reaching every one, holding every one——

And for some inexplicable reason infuriating every one. Marqueray heard, or saw, or felt—how does one sense a frame of mind?—the breath of hostility that was blowing through the hall, the breath of class hatred, the deadly, insidious danger of modern political life. Charm he never so wisely, Mile End put no faith in West, because he was a gentleman, and spoke without an accent, and got his clothes from a good tailor. Sewell could not warrant him, because Sewell was a shopkeeper; nor the President, because he now paid income tax, though he had begun life as a bootblack; no, nor even Dane, with his quiet gray eye and the limp that was a legacy from St. Quentin. No bond holds under the disintegrating touch of class mistrust. One cannot argue with a man who says, "Because you don't belong to my trade, I will not believe you."

Still, there was no open opposition till West used, inadvertently or boldly, a phrase that had become identified with an advanced school of military thought. He was challenged on it by a man in the body of the hall, and a score of voices took up the cry. West, disconcerted, began to hesitate and stammer again; the attack was unforeseen, and it ruffled his easy flow. "Go on, confound you!" said Marqueray between his teeth. "Play up, Aubrey, can't you? If you turn tail now I'll never forgive you——"

"Aubrey won't turn tail," said Val. Marqueray had temporarily forgotten her existence. She was still smiling, diverted by his impatience and not a whit put out by the agitation which was rising all round her.

"You're cool." Marqueray gave her his approval.

"Oh, why not? There's nothing in it so far, and it's not as if Aubrey were a novice. He won't mind a bit; you don't know him if you think that. It will only put him on his mettle."

He did not mind, not a whit. Of all forms of fighting none is more spirited than the tussle between a born debater and an audience which is determined not to hear him. West straightened himself up, slipping one hand into his pocket while the other continued to fiddle with his eyeglass: most men would have thrashed on into the storm under cover of the Chairman's bell and a promise to answer questions at the end of the meeting, but West preferred the neater if bolder trick of getting a hearing for himself under guise of one for his enemy: "One at a time, gentlemen, one at a time;" his pleasant, cool voice, never raised, was of a penetrating quality; Marqueray heard it through not over the din; "Happy to answer all your questions, they show the genuine interest you take. Will the gentleman with the—er—tweed coat and Vandyck beard"—was he actually daring to chaff an angry audience?—"kindly stand up and repeat his remark in an intelligible form?" The Vandyck beard shot up out of a long-haired group, the challenge was repeated: West took it up, turned it deftly inside out, tore it into tatters, made it seem ridiculous even to its chafing sponsor: dropped it and passed on before the Vandyck beard had rallied; and then, sticking to the main drift of his speech, but widening its range and deepening its tone after the born debater's instinct, began to touch the nerves of his audience with fingers under which Marqueray's own heart grew restive, by an appeal to common passions that reconcile all classes in the clasp of a common humanity: to lessons learned in trench and camp, among roofless hearths and wrecked orchards: to noble pity and indignation, "which the world would not willingly let die."

"That's Gawd's trewth, that is," muttered Val's neighbor. "I mind that well enough, I sor it with me own eyes."

"Aubrey is getting hold of them," said Val. And of Dane, too, and of Marqueray, despite the mutiny in his blood. Years faded away like breath from the mirror of

the past, and in its gray crystal the red and black of western warfare grew once more distinct.—“Good heavens, what’s that?”

West was getting hold of Mile End. But his audience were not all of Mile End. There were men in it on whom simplicity and sincerity and banter were alike thrown away. At the outset they had lain low, hoping perhaps that Mile End would strike for them, but when West warmed to his work, and the desultory local clamor began to die down, a roar broke out that made Marqueray start.

“Hallo! Hallo!” He turned to Val. “That means mischief.”

Miss Yarborough had half risen. “Organized,” she said, craning her head to see between or over the heads of the crowd. “Paid and run by signal. It’s that solid block of men in the orchestra. Now who can be at the bottom of it?—I believe they mean to rush the platform.”

Marqueray also rose. Many were rising. “Take my arm, I am going to get you out of this.”

“I’d far rather you would get through to the platform. My father is growing old, and Aubrey is not strong.”

“*Prostor!*”

“What is it?”

“I know now why you wanted me to come,” muttered Marqueray.—“Let me see you safe first, then I’ll go to West.”

He had to bend down and shout in her ear. The commotion was rapidly growing, and three-fourths of the audience were on their feet. Cries of “Shame,” “Give him a hearing,” “We want Yarborough,” were mixed with “Pull him down,” “Throw him out,” and snatches of revolutionary song. Marqueray could see that West was still standing up and still speaking, but his words were drowned. Sir Roger Dane got up and stood by him.

“Come along,” said Marqueray, drawing Val’s hand through his arm. To his relief she turned round at once

and let him make a way for her towards the door. A good many other women were trying to struggle out, and the more decent crowd at the back did not hinder them; indeed Val's costermonger raised a cry of "Lidies houtside." But the hall was packed, and the chairs, clamped together in rows of five, rocked and shifted as their owners rose. The crush grew violent. Midway through, a man's arm shot out and fastened on the gold chain purse that swung from Val's neck. Mile End was making hay while the sun shone. But before one link snapped Marqueray's iron grip closed over the thieving fingers, unlocked them, drew the man's arm taut against the shaft of an electric standard, and doubled it slowly back till the bone broke at the elbow. The unexpected agony wrenched out a deep groan, and Val, cool but very white, made intercession, her lips at Marqueray's ear. "Enough! That's more than a magistrate would give him. Only let us get out of here——!"

A surge of the mob threw them forward, and they never saw any more of the thief than his tweed sleeve and twitching fingers. "No shoving! No shoving!" was the cry now being raised. Marqueray, indifferent to any inconvenience that he might cause to Mile End, locked his left arm round Val's waist and with his right was forcing a channel for her, when a whistle rang out and the tramp of drilled steps was heard.—"The police!"

"What is happening, can you see?" said Val.

"Any number of plain clothes men," said Marqueray, driving heavily forward. They were now in the main gangway and within a few yards of the lobby. Suddenly, amid an outburst of indescribable, of terrifying uproar, every light in the hall went out.

Marqueray uttered a deep oath. Mile End had played with fire, and Mile End was to pay the penalty: in panic, in the shrieks of fainting women, in short, headlong rushing movements as blindly dangerous as the charges of wild cattle in a pen. Luckily Marqueray had taken his bearings

as the lamps flickered into extinction, and seizing Val in his arms he fought his way on, holding her to his breast. Emergency doors were flying open in every direction, and the exit immediately before them gleamed dim through surrounding darkness, for though in the building not one lamp was left alight, the midnight sunshine of an East End thoroughfare shone in through the high lobby windows. Police at the door were shouting "This way! This way!" Marqueray was near the exit when he stumbled over a heap on the ground and set his heel on something pliant, thin, and branched. Having had experience of other riots, he knew what it was, but with Val on his arm he dared not risk getting thrown down in lifting it, and he swung blindly over it and on into the corridor—itsself by now a wild dark sea—on down the littered stairs, through the great main doorway, and out into the street. The street at last!

He looked down at his boot, and shivered; then back at the choked floodway, and set his teeth. Impossible: and, if it had been possible, useless; a waste of time.

"Good heavens!" said Val, "that was the worst I was ever in."

She stood a moment panting, her hand at her throat. "Thank you, Mr. Marqueray. I don't know what would have become of me if it hadn't been for you."

"Where can I leave you?" said Marqueray. "I must get round to the platform. Do you recollect the lie of the land?"

"Let me see, where are we? Is this the door we came in at? Oh," she glanced round her swiftly, "here, up here to the left is your way."

"Where are you taking me?"

"To the orchestra door. Listen, they're wrecking the place!"

She ran, and Marqueray with her, down a side street along the north wall. The place had been surrounded by a strong force of police and was being rapidly cleared, but

it was still unlit, and in the dark, to judge by the noise, a pitched battle was going on. They could distinguish the rip of torn wood and the tinkling smash of glass. "What on earth is it all about?" said Marqueray.

"Probably they want," said Val with her fine little smile, "to terrorize my father."

They reached the orchestra door. A slender, irregular stream of men were pouring out of it, and the police barred Marqueray's path; no one could go in, they said; people were being got out as fast as possible, and the gentleman must wait for his friend. Marqueray took Val to a milk-shop across the way and went to find an inspector. "Mr. Yarborough's daughter is in that shop. She was at the back of the hall with me. Is Mr. Yarborough out yet?—Or Mr. West?—Wouldn't come?—Take care of Miss Yarborough, please, I am going in."

He did it, in the teeth of official opposition: no one knew him, but the inspector recognized Val, and Marqueray's manner carried his point. He edged his way in by feeling along the wall, swung himself up a dark flight of stairs by the balustrade, and by sheer weight and the unscrupulous use he made of it, there being no women to spare, got through to the platform. Here he found some light, for in an ink-black mêlée the beams of electric torches, hand held, shot to and fro with the movements of their owners. It was a strange Inferno.

So far as he could make out, an organized gang had stormed the platform from the orchestra, while individual raiders swarmed up out of the stalls, and the police, taken between two fires, were obliged to divide, some closing in a cordon round Sewell and his group, while others drove back the enemy. Marqueray joined the force on active service and with immense glee kicked one raider back over the footlights and hit another on the head with a chair. But this was levity. His commission was to find out West and Yarborough.—The sudden glare of a torch revealed

West at his elbow, outclassed in weight and numbers, yet holding his own in the dark by a combination of luck and science against a couple of Thames-siders either of whom would have been more than his single match. Light brought double danger. West took one blow that made him reel, and before the cordon could intervene would have been disabled by a kick below the belt, had not his cousin, coming in unbreathed with his fourteen stone of bone and sinew, knocked down both ruffians, right and left, one after the other.

"Hallo! Hi! Come out of that, you little gamecock!" Marqueray shouted.

Seizing West by his coat tails he dragged him ruthlessly to the stairs and they tumbled down them together. In the corridor below, where the stream was running thin, Marqueray stopped to get his breath. "What the devil were you up to, Aubrey? Why couldn't you leave Mile End and the bobbies to fight it out? Where's Yarborough?"

"I don't know, it was such a mix-up. We couldn't be the first off the platform," said West apologetically. He was looking a little sheepish, and he held his handkerchief to his nose. "Some one chucked a—something; I don't know what, at Yarborough, and it hit old Sewell and cut his head open. It wasn't easy to get him off the platform in the dark, so we stayed to cover his retreat. Look here, I'm going back; Mr. Yarborough isn't out yet——"

"You stay here, I'll go," said Marqueray, but as he turned, Yarborough and Sir Roger Dane appeared together, and at the same moment the lamps flashed up again all over the building. Followed an immediate cessation of hostilities overhead, a universal hush, and a thunder of steps in full flight to every door. Riot, native or imported, did not care to court recognition and arrest.

"That you, Aubrey my boy? Why, what a dust! what a turn-up, to be sure!" Yarborough's deep voice made

itself heard. He was as unaffectedly cool as his daughter, and seemed to have kept out of the fray, but Dane was exceedingly disheveled, and West looked as if he had been rolling on the floor. They stood and stared at one another. It had all happened so rapidly that none of them quite knew what had happened. Probably the time between the going out of the lamps and their relighting was nearer five than ten minutes.

"What an extraordinary fracas!" said Dane. "What or who was at the back of it?"

"What brought you here, Dan?" said, or rather snuffled West. "I had no notion you were coming. Jolly lucky for me you did, though."

"Aubrey in the wars, as usual!"

"So are you, sir," retorted West. ("Excuse me, Dan." He picked Marqueray's breast pocket of his handkerchief.) "Look at your arm!"

Yarborough's wrist was red and swollen. "Now I come to think of it, I believe some one hit me with a stick at an early stage of the proceedings. Well I'm damned. This is a pretty state of things. Look at your knuckles, Mr. Marqueray! You had better find a pump, Aubrey: and, Dane, your tie has gone adrift."

"Sticking-plaster for all of us," remarked Marqueray. "In the meanwhile, I've left Miss Yarborough in a milk-shop across the road."

"My daughter!" Yarborough exclaimed. "Stupid child——!"

Marqueray went to fetch Val, who turned rather white again at sight of the blood on his hands. He took her swiftly back through the crowd into the committee-room, where they found Yarborough sitting with his coat off and his sleeve rolled up from a sprained arm, and West methodically sluicing his head in a pail of water, in the center of a knot of medical men, reporters, and officials from the Yard—the Yard stiffly apologetic, but in a bad temper

because it was responsible for protecting gentlemen who had not allowed themselves to be protected. Sir Roger Dane was vowing vengeance. He said, and the others agreed, that the meeting had been wrecked by organized outside hostility; but by whose? It was a question that no one could yet answer, not even the officials from the Yard, who had had warnings of a riot, but not of a riot like this. Twenty plain clothes men had been detailed to mix with the audience, while twenty more in uniform were held in reserve, but till the lamps came on again they had hardly been able to hold their own. Of the rioters now under arrest, not one called himself a Mile-ENDER. The majority were dockers, rough and heavily built, picked, one might suppose, for their physique. Pending a solution, Yarborough gave curt orders that details were to be kept as far as possible out of the papers. Some admissions were inevitable, for the fittings of the hall had been wrecked, several windows broken, many persons injured, and at least one life lost. But he insisted on having the scene softened down as far as possible into a mere scuffle which had taken a tragic end in consequence of the lights' going out and a panic rush to the doors.

They were not allowed to get away without evidence that the wreckers were an alien element. Yarborough was well known in Mile End and personally popular. Dane, a Service Member and an old V.C., had held his constituency since before the war. Whatever discontent with recent Ministerial policy was felt in the district, it was drowned now in a burst of indignation and sympathy. When at length the heroes of the evening—Yarborough and his daughter, Dane, West, and Marqueray—had extricated themselves from their official supporters and were packed into Dane's big car on their way home, they found themselves wedged into a solid block of Mile End loyalists, who kept them crawling and halting the length of the Mile End Road to the tune of "For they're all jolly good fellows."

"Hang it, they're worse than the other lot," said Marqueray. "Hallo! Hallo! Look there, Aubrey!"

"Where?" said West, peering with his short-sighted eyes at a flaring coster stall. Marqueray muttered, "Why can't you get a pair of spectacles?" and gripped his arm. A second car, held up in front of their own, had turned to cut down a side-street out of the crush, and in turning came momentarily abreast of them. Its solitary tenant, sitting far back with a fur collar pulled up to his ears and a peaked cap pulled down over his eyes, would have escaped any less penetrating stare than Marqueray's.

"It is our little friend March," said Marqueray. "Pat to the happy moment. Oh, I say, Aubrey, there's nothing left of your eyeglass but the ribbon!"

CHAPTER XII

You love me not.

I do not like your faults.

A friendly eye could never see such faults.

WEST was finishing breakfast when Marqueray rang at his bell next morning; i.e., it was ten minutes past eight. Mrs. Fielden, who opened the door, looked as if she would have liked to shut it again,—she didn't hold with Mr. Orbery's being worried before he'd swallowed his porridge,—but Marqueray got inside while she hung in the wind, admonished her against giddiness, dropped a kiss on her cheek (an adventure which had not often happened to her even in the days of her rustic youth), and was in the dining-room before she could say Jack Robinson. Not that Jack Robinson was what she wished to say.

Marqueray sat down and lit his inevitable cigar. West, who had learned by now to be surprised at no unexpected appearances on Dan's part,—he was slipping into the way of calling him Dan, less of his own will than because Robert Vere did so,—merely raised his eyebrows in a mild surprise and asked if Marqueray would join him in a cup of coffee. Marqueray snorted—"Call that stuff coffee?"—and West, not feeling it necessary to press his *tenuis avena*, his poached egg, or his buttered toast on the supercilious visitor, went on with his own meal. The room was pleasantly lit by a ray of morning sunshine, there was an agreeable smell of roast chicory, a literal, not a metaphorical kitten walked about among West's china and sniffed fastidiously at the milk jug, and West himself, in his gray morning clothes, looked more like a respectable young clerk

about to set off for his office than a budding statesman. "How is the nose?" Marqueray asked, examining it distantly and delicately: "a little pink, I see."

"A little pink and more than a little tender. How are your knuckles?" Marqueray silently exhibited a three-inch strip of plaster. "That was the fellow with the red beard; I heard your ring rattle on his teeth. Thank you for your timely aid."

"Delighted to be of any use," murmured Marqueray. He tilted his chair back and threw one leg over the arm of it. "But don't thank me, I like it. Not that I can hope to emulate your shining Christian graces." West eyed him suspiciously. "In fact it wasn't till last night that I properly grasped the theory. I've often heard of turning the other cheek, but it never struck me that it meant taking on two at a time."

"Dan!"

"Sir?"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Pretty manners."

"I will not be ragged in my own house before nine o'clock in the morning."

"You will be ragged when I like and where I like and in any way I like," said Marqueray, balancing his chair precariously on one leg. "I'm dashed if you haven't got a new eyeglass already! Really, it's a pity not to wear proper glasses when you have so much more nose than usual to put them on. Pax, oh!" as West started up. "This incurable levity, Aubrey, will militate, I fear, against your success in public life. That was a deuce of a row last night. Have you really no notion who put them up to it?"

"I haven't—not the faintest. But there are some strong under-currents in the political world just now. A sort of backwash from the war," said West, pouring himself out a second cup of coffee. "You can't expect our late enemy to like the existing commercial situation. Of course, I

don't know that she had any hand in this particular row. But as it was—so they say—in the year or two before the war, when one was constantly coming up against unexpected opposition or running into indistinct foreign intrigues, so it is to-day, and with a dangerous element of roughness added, which Mr. Vere says was developed in the war. The same influences that drove your uncle out of office are beginning to work against Yarborough now that he's shown more of his hand. There are a lot of business men who are out for compromise simply because it would put money in their pockets. Brazil and Chile hit them pretty hard, and they think Peru will hit them worse. They say the Chief has shifted his position and that he's as bad now as Mr. Vere. There's some truth in that. It can't, in fact, be otherwise; private members who aren't responsible may follow what line they like, but any able man who goes to the F.O. is bound to take the F.O. point of view. People are fond of kicking up their heels so long as they aren't in the traces. But you're a Gallio—you care for none of these things."

"I'm a humbug. I came round early to tell you so." Marqueray sat forward in his chair, drawing in his legs and tossing his cigar into the fire. "I've told you some thundering lies, but now I'm going to tell you the truth."

"Lies, Dan?"

"Flat ones. Quite impersonal: I keep two codes, one for private and the other for public use. Most honest spies do that, don't they?" He smiled into West's amazed eyes. "I'm not clear how I ought to class myself—whether spy is or isn't the correct technical term for me. Let's put it more politely. I am—have been for years—an unpaid, unaccredited agent of our Foreign Office."

"What do you say?"

"I dropped into it directly war was over, more or less by accident. I was at a bit of a loose end, for the Army as profession bored me, I couldn't stand the bally times of

peace, and I thought it would be amusing to take a gun and a horse to the Balkans and see what happened. Talking about it to Vere, he said, 'If you go, you may as well keep your eyes open. There's always a good deal to be learned on the spot if a man has brains enough to mix with the natives and talk the vernacular.' So I said, 'Right you are,' and I went for a six-months' tramp. I wandered hundreds of miles on foot, which was then the only and will always be the best way to get to know the ins and outs of a half-civilized country. In Serbia I was George Danvers, in Bulgaria I was Adolf Scheidemann of Berlin. *Bozhe moï*, what fun I had! For a youngster fresh from Army discipline the freedom and the—the trickery of it were like playing at Indians. Only it wasn't play. You know, there was a lot of muddle going on over the map of Europe. Half the time we didn't really know what we were talking about because our fellows weren't good enough linguists to get to the bottom of things and form their own judgment. I came home and made my report. Vere said it was crude enough, but showed a natural gift for assimilating the right sort of detail: it told him what they were saying in inns and mills and factories and on the streets and at the village wineshops. He was at that time deep in endless ex-war negotiations, details that crop up when the Most Holy and Indivisible Trinity have cleared the ground. To cut a long story short, he said I was useful."

West had finished his breakfast, but he sat on at the table. Selina nudged his elbow with her small black nose, but even Selina's wants went for once without attention.

"And I have, in one part of the globe or another, been doing the same sort of job ever since. I went nominally to shoot or fish or climb,—whatever sort of sport the storm center promised,—but it was the storm center that I hunted. My reports came across in cipher, unsigned. I had no official standing. I was never in regular touch with any F.O. man except Vere. But—I had access, through Vere, to

any F.O. documents, public or private. Any man's dossier was at my service. Negotiations of the most difficult and delicate nature Vere would put into my hands, papers that foreign Governments would have shot me to get hold of. I do not recollect that in all the years we worked together Vere refused me the answer to any question; and if he got out of refusing by a lie, I never caught him at it. I imagine that he must often have technically broken pledges of secrecy. But I was his *alter ego*, not to say his *âme damnée*. He made a mental reservation in my favor, I suppose. Literally, I didn't count."

"I cannot conceive why you did it. Do you say you weren't paid?"

Marquera y was silent for a moment.

"No, I was never paid. I am a rich man, don't you see? Money is no object to me. I did it for the fun of the thing. You can't understand that? I have the taste for finesse in my blood; I love an adroit lie. It's a great game."

"Why must you tell me all this?"

"You don't like it? I knew you wouldn't. Underhand work, eh? Yes, in my official career I do work underhand. Look here: when I threw myself into your arms outside Victoria Gardens I had at first no motive but an underhand one. I wanted to get through you a footing with Yarborough."

"You mean," said West, who had done some rapid thinking in the last five minutes, "because Mr. Vere has left the F.O. and so could no longer betray—I beg your pardon—share his knowledge with you?"

Marquera y nodded. "I foresaw how it would be as soon as I heard of Vere's mishap, and that was what fetched me home in such a hurry from Peru. I hadn't half done my work there, but I was working blindfold. I wasn't sure—I am not, now—how far Yarborough has gone with

their Government or what precise line he's taken. I could tell him plenty of interesting details. But would he trust me enough to give me the details I want in return? That's where you were to come in useful. I couldn't use Vere; though he and Yarborough are a pair of augurs: they have a good deal of fundamental common understanding, more than I realized when I spoke to you before. Still, things have been awkward between them, and there's no doubt Vere felt it more than he'll admit, and has been and still is very sore over it all. I asked him point blank if he would give me an introduction, but he said he would see me damned first, and it was then I thought of getting at Yarborough through you. You're his secretary and my cousin."

"Why couldn't you go to Yarborough direct?"

"Because a business interview is no earthly use to me. I've no standing, my position is unratified; I've nothing to show for myself except my bare word and an extensive and peculiar knowledge of foreign affairs for which any but a British government would have me shot in the Tower. It would have been simple enough if Bobby would have given me three lines of writing to certify that I had been behind the scenes with him, but when he flatly refused to do it, where was I to go? What I wanted out of you was a warranty of my good faith. I still want it. If you won't give it me I must try Yarborough direct. But he's a suspicious beggar and as close as wax. He will, very properly, take all and give nothing; and, though I can tell him some interesting things, they won't be half so interesting as they would be if I could get the run of our own intelligence resources for a few days. I can give him A, B, and C; but if you'll get him to give me D, E, F, and G I'll hand him over the rest of the alphabet. Among other details which may have been puzzling him, I shall be surprised if I can't let him know who ran the riot last night."

"Are you serious?" said West.

"Exceedingly so," Marqueray answered. "I trod on a woman's hand on my way to the door."

"On a——?"

"You heard Goss, the police superintendent, say there was a woman killed? I stumbled over her in the gangway."

"But, good heavens, Dan! you didn't leave her there?"

Again Marqueray sat silent for a moment.

"I had Miss Yarborough to see after. You know, Aubrey, I'm not like Cerberus, three gentlemen at once."

"Couldn't you have gone back for her?"

"Not before two or three hundred men had fought their way out over her. Have you ever seen a body that has been trodden on by a mob? I have, and I didn't care to go back without a broom."

"Horrible!" said West, shuddering. "And you know the brute who was responsible?"

"I think I do," said Marqueray. "It is the same hand, I swear it is the same hand I had against me in Peru. There's an unscrupulous ruffian out there—that is, he has agents out there; he himself is English and pulls the strings from London—who is fomenting trouble with a single eye to the exploitation of his own mining interests. He backs the Germanophil party because they've given him big concessions, and he has been spending money like water to run a German candidate for the next Presidential election. Here at home the same man—I'll swear it is so—utilizes Labor discontent to upset Government meetings and intimidate your Chief."

"Who is he?"

"I'd rather not give you the name. I'm not sure of it, and till I am sure of it I've no right to give it to any one but Yarborough. If he will tell me certain things that I've been vainly trying to find out for myself, City and political facts that I can't get at because I've no leverage on the

men who hold them, I'll fit my jigsaw together and he can see how he likes the pattern. But for that he must trust me. Will you be my sponsor?"

"The guarantee of your—personal or political honesty?"

"Personal," said Marqueray. "Do not you make any mistake about that. You know well enough that international trade treaties are a gold mine to any man who gets a chance to speculate in them. You must pass your word to Yarborough for my—well, say my honor. You must convince him that, if he trusts me with secrets which I could sell or traffic in, no money will, in fact, stick to my fingers. You must also make him understand that with me it's all or nothing. If he hedges, I shall hedge. But if he will trust me unreservedly—not as Vere did: I'm not Yarborough's nephew, and I don't aspire to be his *âme damnée*: perhaps the damnation would be rather too deep: but as openly as is compatible with his official duties—I will in my turn trust him, and without the slightest further hesitation I will be absolutely frank with him, or, if he would rather work through you, with you."

"Did you suggest the South Cambs move to Mr. Vere because you wanted to lay me under an obligation to you?"

"To some extent, I did."

"You put Yarborough also under a very heavy obligation last night."

Marqueray stared at him. "Did I? I wasn't aware—Oh, you mean about Miss Yarborough? No, really, I hadn't any sinister motive there: when a woman asks you for your escort you can't very well refuse her, nor can you, when you have her on your hands, drop her underfoot in a mob. No, till this moment it hadn't occurred to me that Yarborough would think he owed me any sort of debt for last night. Don't refine too much, my good chap."

"One more question, and I'm done. A few days ago you were good enough to make me a personal offer of

friendship. Am I to understand that that was part of what you call the game?"

"No," said Marqueray curtly.

"You weren't at that time"—West's rather stern eyes softened—"combining business with pleasure?"

"You're not much of a judge of men, are you, Aubrey?"

"You've amazed me so much that I don't feel as if I knew anything about you," said West.

He sat back in his chair looking thoughtfully at Marqueray. Selina, observing a break in the conversation, thought that her time had come for a little attention, and walked gently up West's arm and rubbed her nose under his chin: West poured her out a saucer of milk, and watched her spring down and fall to on it, but his mind was far away. He was filling in the gaps of Marqueray's tale. How extraordinary it was no one knew better than West, who had lived too long behind the scenes to under-rate it. So year after year Dan Marqueray, known all over Europe as a rich and idle sportsman, had under this mask been pitting his keen amateur brains and photographic faculties of observation against the professionals of the enemy ring! He had worked without pay and incidentally without protection. Newspapers cannot exaggerate, they can only color with romance, the hardship and downright danger of such a life. Over and over again he must have come up against organizations which would no more have scrupled to remove him in time of peace than in time of war; and if he had been quietly removed, if an accident had befallen him on a sporting expedition, or if he had simply disappeared into a foreign prison, or the last long prison of all, Vere himself would have been unable to make more than the natural inquiries, and would have had to accept any natural explanation. It took steady nerves, West reflected, to play a game like that.

Always masked! West had never had the faintest sus-

picion of any political interest in Marqueray's life, nor heard any rumor of it. Yet, moving as he did among men whose interests were predominantly political, Marqueray must over and over again have been tempted to betray himself by the most natural of all slips—by a comment, or a question, or a glance which showed more knowledge than he was entitled to possess. West could not recollect any such slip. He had talked of politics to Marqueray, and to Vere before Marqueray, more freely than usual, partly from faith in Marqueray's cousinly discretion, but still more because he never thought of Marqueray's being interested; and never once had Marqueray betrayed undue interest. He had remained always the same—cheerful, polite, amused by gossip, slightly bored by discussion. A brilliant piece of acting; but West, himself frank to a fault—in his unbuttoned hours he hated having to keep up even the necessary reserves of official life—was only repelled by finding this trait in Marqueray's character.

The conclusion to which it led him was that any further intimacy between him and Marqueray was out of the question. However clearly he recognized Marqueray's political honesty,—and it cost him an effort to get as far as that,—a line was ruled between it and Marqueray's private dealing. When a man owns that he has courted your friendship and tried to lay you under an obligation with a view to making a tool of you, it is a little difficult to accept his next assurance that at some unspecified point he began to desire your liking for its own sake. May not this, too, be a rather more subtle extension of the original ruse? Friendship is not to be cheapened at a bargain. West did believe that his cousin, as an amateur spy, was to be trusted. But as the old Dan Marqueray—no. That odd and rather touching little incident was over.

“So far as I am myself concerned, if I were acting for my own hand, I would willingly make myself your sponsor,” he said in a slow, rather precise manner. “But you

won't be offended if I say that, as the risk is not mine, I've no right to trust you, and I should like to ask Mr. Vere if he would mind giving me the confirmation which you say he wouldn't give to Mr. Yarborough. Have I leave?"

Marqueray nodded.

West went to the telephone and gave Vere's number in Wellwood Square. It was still too early for the rush of business, and in three or four minutes he got through.

"Is that you, sir? I'm Aubrey, speaking from Chelsea. Marqueray is here."

West hesitated, feeling faintly shy of Marqueray, who watched without a shade of expression in his pleasant blue eyes. West was dimly aware that in Marqueray's shoes he would have lost his temper ten times over in the last half hour. In the main, no doubt, Marqueray's patient good humor sprang from thickness of hide, and yet West wasn't sure if he were altogether cynical.

"He"—it was hard to frame a formula that was not an implied insult—"he has been telling me some rather—queer stories—which he says you can confirm. As a matter of form—of course I believe what he says—but as a matter of form do you mind telling me if it's tr—if it's a fact that—that he was in your confidence when you were at the F.O.?"

Vere's deep voice came back, low and guarded. "Entirely in my confidence."

"Thanks. It was only a—a technical question. Good-by, sir." West turned round. "I'll speak to Mr. Yarborough to-day and get him to fix a time for you to see him. Will that do?"

"Thanks very much, I'm immensely grateful," Marqueray declared.

He got up, lightly stretching himself, and stood before the fire, his hands still held over his head: then thrusting

them deep into his trouser pockets, "Ouf! That's over. I seldom have dreaded anything so much as telling you this, Aubrey."

"You—dreaded——?"

"Because I knew so well how you would take it," said Marqueray with his peculiar smile. He lounged across the room and took West by the shoulders. "Never mind! Never mind! I know what you're saying to yourself. Go on, say it and be hanged to you: you'll go on saying it continuously for the next six months, after that at short intervals for a year or two, after that—oh! probably once a twelvemonth to your life's end. I've shocked all your baby prejudices, and you're tenacious of impressions, aren't you? Never mind; I can wait. *Aequanimiter in arduis*. It isn't a bad motto in this rather weary world." He returned to his chair and a second cigar. "Don't fidget and look at the clock. You want to get to work, don't you? But your Chief will excuse you for another ten minutes. I'm sure you're never late. I think I see you 'descending from a 'bus' six mornings in the week at eight and twenty past nine. Are you afraid of being gated? Tell Proggins you've not done a bad morning's work for him already. . . . Another ten minutes I say you shall give me, and this time on a personal matter."

He sat silent for a little while, smoking rather fast. West also waited in a patience which would have tried him more if Marqueray had perplexed him less.

"I told you just now that with me it's all or nothing." Marqueray shifted in his chair, his shoulders braced back, his eyes gleaming incongruously blue against his brick-colored skin. "I am not really much fonder of sailing under false colors than you are, and in all relations between you and me I choose to be absolutely frank. When I met you in the Park yesterday, I told you that if I ran across Miss Browne in Harlesden I should not speak to her. I

must confess that I broke that promise; and I give you warning that I propose to take over the rôle of her—protector—in the technical sense.”

“*What* are you telling me?” West said, this time perfectly incredulous.

“You constituted yourself her guardian,”—Marqueray continued to face his cousin with a steady eye,—“and, as we were in it together, I won’t steal a march on you. I did meet her, and I spoke to her, and I’ve changed my mind about her. You and I made the same mistake of taking a pretty woman a little too seriously. No, we won’t discuss her. Quite right. Except that I may add I quite believe she is, apart from the connection with Marchmont, technically innocent. I’ll even admit that in that connection she may have been abominably wronged. By dint of a small but lucky experiment, I’ve found out that March is still terrified of the sight of her, which probably indicates some perverse freak of what he calls his conscience. But, if you think a woman can emerge uncorrupted from that sort of connection with a man like March, you’re mistaken, and you only show ignorance of life. I was a fool to fancy it—a fool.”

“I can’t discuss her with you. Your way of looking at women is different from mine.”

“And little Phyllida is very different from—the type of woman you admire. But I admire her, and I’m going to see if the attraction is mutual.”

“Do you mean to make her your mistress?” West asked, shocked into bluntness.

“My mistress, yes.” He lingered over the beautiful, debased word with an involuntary tenderness better suited to its earlier meaning.

“But, Dan,” said West, “—but, Dan, you’re in love with her!”

“So I am,” said Marqueray, smiling. “Very much in love.”

"Why don't you marry her?"

"Marry her?"

"You're your own master. Mr. Vere wouldn't like it at the outset, but he would come round when he knew her. He's keen on your marrying, and it's not as if she weren't gently bred. She is of the protected class, the class that even a cur like Marchmont wouldn't have dared to touch if circumstances hadn't played into his hands. Because that little brute wronged her,"—West was white with passion,—“does that give every other man the right to wrong her? Why don't you do the straight thing and marry her?"

"Oh, how young you are, Aubrey!" said Marqueray in his soft, mocking voice. "*O sancta simplicitas!* Why don't I marry her? Because I don't want to marry any one, and if I did I shouldn't marry Marchmont's leavings."

"You say that, and in the same breath say that she was innocent and he wronged her!"

"If I break this vase of yours, it's not the fault of the vase but mine. Yet, indisputably, the vase is broken."

"Sophistry," said West. "You're doing a cruel, cowardly thing, and one you wouldn't dare do if she had a father or brother."

". . . Say what you will," said Marqueray. He got up and stood leaning his arm along the mantelpiece. "I rather wish you could stop me, Aubrey. But you won't."

"I don't see what's to be gained by going on with this discussion," said West. He looked, as he felt, heartsick. "Apparently nothing I can say will make you give up what seems to me to be a most merciless, cold-blooded seduction. The child is very young, very lonely, and in a perfectly unprotected position. You have a pretty strong will and all the resources that money gives. If you set yourself to ruin her, I dare say you'll succeed. Poor child! poor little Phyllida! as if she hadn't suffered enough at Marchmont's hands, is she to suffer the same misery over

again at yours? Is it to be the river again for the child you helped to rescue?"

"Most certainly not," said Marquera y dryly. "I am not March, Aubrey. I shan't bully her, I shan't trap her, and in the long run I shan't turn her adrift. On the contrary, if she behaves well and doesn't give me the slip, I shall settle her in easy circumstances for the rest of her life. If you would only believe it, she won't be a hair the worse for me in any way that will ever worry her." He believed that he believed what he said. "She was made, I concede it, to be a good little wife to a good husband (not, in any case, to me; I'm not a marrying man). But after falling into Marchmont's clutches, which have spoilt her for a wife, she is not the sort of woman to *coiffer Sainte Cathérine* in romantic virtue. Her future career is bound to cover one or two further amatory incidents, and if she never meets any one who will treat her worse than I shall she'll be lucky."

"I shall put her on her guard against you."

"Do," said Marquera y. "I'm not out to take unfair advantage of her."

He picked up his gloves and stick as he spoke and moved towards the door. West caught his arm. "Marquera y! If what you said a few nights ago and again just now was true, that you set any value on what I think of you or feel for you, I do beg—I do most earnestly beg you as a personal favor to give up this idea. You said yourself the child is under my care. So she is: if she has no father, I count her as my sister, a young sister whom I'd protect if I could with my life. What her relations were with Marchmont I don't know. What they will be with you if you care to put out all your strength against her, I'm afraid I can guess. But don't do it." Marquera y stood looking down on him.

"Don't," said West. "I dare say you can defeat her if you like. But don't do it. You'll regret it if you do. If

you're as honest six months hence as you are to-day, you'll own to me that you would give your right hand to undo what you've done. One feels so differently before and after. Heavens, do you think I don't understand what you're fighting against? But you can protect her from yourself if you like. Be merciful, Dan, this once, for my sake if for no other."

"Can't," said Marqueray, his levity breaking down. He shook off his cousin's hand. "I can't sleep for thinking of her."

"You—and that child?"

"Queer, isn't it? 'Like will to unlike.' Yes. I must have her."

"Your own love ought to be her protection. You care more for her than you confess—I think, more than you know. You school your face, but you don't know how your voice changes when you speak of her."

Marqueray's cheek burned. "Six weeks is all I desire."

West looked at him with a sudden heavy keenness. "Dan, you're riding for a fall."

CHAPTER XIII

O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee!

MARQUERAY like most men kept his work and play, *scilicet* his political intrigues and his pursuit of Phyllida, in separate compartments. They had crossed in his interview with West, which, little as Marqueray betrayed or West believed it, had been the most painful experience undergone by him for many years; but when West went to work, Marqueray switched off the connection. He returned to his rooms and sat down to yesterday's arrears of correspondence, some in script, some in cipher, upon which he had to bend every faculty . . . and, lo and behold! for the first time for many years the ductile mind rebelled. Marqueray felt fevered. He pushed away his papers and let his head fall on his arms. Banks, coming in with the day's tale of golden Niel roses from Covent Garden, found him in this attitude, and asked in a tone of almost human solicitude, "I beg pardon, sir, aren't you well?" He might get as good a master, but hardly so good a place.

"What?—Oh yes, thanks," said Marqueray, grinning to himself. This sort of thing would never do! He threw himself back in his chair and allowed Banks to meet his eye. Banks was too decorous to smile, but a gleam of sympathetic apprehension crossed his features. "I may be away for a day or two," said Marqueray. "I may run down into Surrey for the week-end."

"Very good, sir; shall I pack your suit-case?"

"No—yes. Pack it and send it off by train in case I go down by car. Let it be there to-night."

"Shall I forward your letters, sir?"

"No, let them pile up. I shall be back on Monday. Don't let any one have my address."

"Very good, sir," said Banks. Then in a deprecating manner, "Should you have any objection, sir, to me shutting up the rooms and going away myself for the three nights you won't be here? I haven't had a holiday for some time, and I thought, if you was away, if it would be perfectly convenient, you wouldn't mind if I was to go and see my old mother. I could be back here Monday morning in plenty of time to have it all ready against your return."

"Your old mother, eh?" said Marqueray.

"If it was quite convenient to you, sir."

"How old is your old mother?"

"Seventy-five come June, sir."

"Where does she live?"

"In Kent, sir, at a little place called Sundridge."

"All right, you can go," said Marqueray. He stretched out his hand and there was a crisp rustle of paper. "Here, take this and have a good time, Banks—you and your old mother."

Banks was not so sure on second thoughts that he would ever get as good a master again. Marqueray, left alone, was certain that he would never get a better servant. "Hang the fellow, he does it as well as I do," he reflected. Not by the tremor of an eyelid or the variation of a semi-tone had Banks betrayed that he was lying, and Marqueray knew it only by instinct. But he did know it: he would have laid any odds that Banks' old mother—if he had one—would not share in the fingering of that crisp, extravagant note. "We're a pair, Banks and I," Marqueray murmured.

He got up from his bureau leaving a mass of work un-

touched and dropped heavily into the chair that Phyllida had sat in. Two sentences that West had spoken lingered in his ear—"You can protect her against yourself if you like," and "I shall put her on her guard." Unfortunately the one tended to neutralize the other, for they touched in him all that was generous and all that was combative.

It is hard to make Marqueray's state of mind clear at this time, because it was not clear to himself. He took love for passion, a rare error which is even more fatal than the common one of taking passion for love: and it led him into singular inconsistencies and indecisions. He believed that to make Phyllida his mistress would content him, and so long as she was protected by circumstances he believed also that these formed the only barrier between him and her, but as soon as she was in his power he became afraid to touch her. His face burnt whenever he recalled the tame part he had played the previous afternoon. Not to touch a woman may be well enough, but to touch her and let her go, what folly! It was not as if she were chaste: after yielding to Marchmont, she might as well yield again to him: and how sweet it would have been, sweet beyond all other sweetness, to ease his deep, unsatisfied restlessness of mind and body in her cool arms! Present, she was midway between a delight and a torment, but absent she was purely enchanting, and he let his heart linger over the memory of her weak, dimpled wrists, her delicate poise of foot and hand and head, and the child's frame which he could have gathered up like a shut rosebud against his breast. . . .

In giving rein to these dreams, Marqueray was deliberately stimulating the animal side of his passion for Phyllida. He was sick and tired of it, he wanted to end it one way or another, and the quicker way to end it was to indulge it, for he could not spare time or energy to fight it. Dimly he surmised that it had struck root deep in him and would be hard to fight. Every man's love, and every woman's love too for that matter, has its physical as well as

its spiritual elements, the former as pure as the latter, one may believe, since they fulfill the creative purpose of the world, but more liable to abuse; and Marqueray, as he sat and watched the Thames unrolling itself under his windows like some great, glossy snake, was drugging himself with moral poison. Relaxed in mind and limb, he shut his eyes, stretched himself out in his chair, and surrendered to the sensual fantasy.—In more or less cold blood he was whipping himself on to take what he desired by hook or by crook. This is the sort of brutality into which well-meaning men are betrayed, to their eternal remorse, by mixed motives and confused issues.

The plan that he settled on was simple, base, and inconsistent: simple because it was a variation of yesterday's theme, inconsistent because it traded on an innocence which *ex hypothesi* Phyllida no longer retained. His one excuse—a poor one, West would have said—was that he did not believe her to be innocent. Whatever apology could be made—but she had made none—for her running off with Marchmont, a good girl would have run away from him as soon as she found out what he was like. Phyllida, then, was not a good girl. She was a votary of Eros, a nymph of primeval woods, and fair play to any man in whom she woke the primeval Faun.

And yet he loved her, and his heart ached for her, deny it as he would: he had never felt so unhappy in his life. He dropped his face on his hands and sat still, not fighting now, nor dreaming, but giving himself up to cruel pain. If he could only have believed her innocent! But if any hope were left after Harlesden, it had been destroyed in Whitehall Court. He was magnanimous, and had kept her slip a secret from West, though West had cut him deeply, but every recollection of it was like a whipstroke on his pride. She had gone away laughing at him. "Ye never took it after all. . . ." Marqueray stirred and sighed as a man does when some bitter wound sends its

long throbs down his veins. He raised himself to his feet, throwing back his arms and straightening his bent shoulders. Folly! folly! and his wretchedness hardened into anger. Innocent? Far from it, and if she did not fall to him she would fall to another lover: very well, she should fall to him first, and he would take his revenge on her for having made him suffer.

He was calmer now that he had formed his resolution, and he went back to his letters and dealt with them methodically, putting Phyllida out of his head. He had scarcely cleared them when he was rung up on the telephone by West with news that Yarborough would see him from two o'clock to two-thirty, if that would suit him. It suited Marqueray perfectly. He wrote a note which he despatched by hand to Harlesden, lunched at the Tacenda Club, and had a few words with Robert Vere, who was anxious to learn how he had got on with West. At two o'clock Marqueray entered the Foreign Office, and when he left it half an hour later the memory of Phyllida was so far wiped from his mind that he was surprised to find his car crawling up and down outside. Why had he ordered it to wait for him? Oh! yes, to be sure.—Marqueray sent his chauffeur home and himself took the steering wheel.

Then indecision fell on him again, and he slipped across Whitehall to his own rooms. Should he? should he not? Say what one would, it was an ugly part to play; and the dumb, blind, embryo love in him touched his nerves with fear. It was nothing more nor less than the irrepressible anguish in Banks' eyes upon his unexpected reappearance which turned the scale. If he didn't go down into Surrey, Banks couldn't get his week-end. Banks was a rogue—and isn't any man entitled to be a rogue now and again for a week-end? How long and merrily Robert Vere would have laughed at him! "Chastity, Dan, is an effeminate virtue" . . . the old influence, so much stronger than either Dan or Vere understood, was at its deadly work

again.—Marqueray nodded good-by to Banks and went back to his car. After all, the issue lay with Phyllida. If by any desperate chance she was what West thought her, she would not come with him: if she came——

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he would take his revenge on her for having made him suffer.

Phyllida was what West thought her, and yet she never thought of not coming. "As a sign that you forgive me . . ." Forgive was it? sure 'twas Mr. Marqueray that had everything to forgive! "We shall get few more days as fine as this, and the Surrey woods are topping." It was a beautiful day indeed, but if it had thundered and hailed Miss Browne would have gone. "Beg Mrs. Drew to let you go." There, then, Father Ryan himself couldn't have said anything after that!

How could Phyllida remain so blind? Phyllida believed in angels and devils, and ghosts, and very nearly in fairies. Her mind was a jumble of womanly shrewdness and Cinderella-dreams. Marqueray had frightened her out of her wits; but he hadn't done her any hurt; and the conclusion at which her sapience arrived was that she was a wicked girl who didn't deserve people to be good to her. He was so much older and wiser and taller that the least she could do was to trust him. How did he know about Italy? Phyllida, for whom the night on Chelsea Bridge was a mere blur, could only shake her head over such a miracle. And yet Omniscience had gone down on his knee before her! This memory gave Miss Browne pins and needles in her fingertips, and filled her head with golden fancies which she cared no more to translate into terms of common life than a butterfly to count the calories in the sunshine which fans his velvet wing. She did form one

plan for the future: it was that if Mr. Marqueray ever knelt to her again, she would not be too shy to caress him.

She put her own interpretation on the end of Marqueray's note by carrying it to Mrs. Drew. Joanna raised her eyes from the Coal Club accounts to examine Marqueray's bold, free writing. "Does he ask me to read it? . . . No? then I won't. It is the man who came to see you yesterday?" She leaned her forehead on her hand, thinking deep and rapidly. She was not a timid woman, and she loved life, and Marqueray during their brief intercourse had made a strong impression on her. "He is taken with her, and the child ought to have her chance," she reflected. "He can't meet her in the nursery, and he is not the man to let me force his hand. If I say no, he will either drop her or meet her secretly. There is only one way to deal with a man like him and that is to trust him and let him know it." Weighing risk against risk, she believed Phyllida's innocence to be her protection against a man of Marqueray's type.

"Would you like to go?—I see you would. It will be inconvenient, but I'll let you go for once. Mind, it is only for once. Start at three and tell him to bring you back by six. You understand, Phyllida, when I say six I mean six not six-thirty." Phyllida, pink with joy, murmured, "O' course," with a little nod. "Did you," said Mrs. Drew, picking up her pen again, "tell Mr. Marqueray that Selwyn Yarborough drove you to Park Lane yesterday?"

"Oh no, I didn't. Shall I?"

"I think I would," said Mrs. Drew.

"You're ready," said Marqueray. "That's right."

His course was clear now, and when the big, open car drew up to the pavement he did not even get out of it. He signed to Phyllida to sit beside him, and Phyllida, docile and happy, nestled down among her cushions like a good little girl whose kind uncle is taking her to a pantomime.

This time Marqueray did not reflect that she was a shabby person to be seen in his company. He caught up an immense rug from the seat behind, flung it over her knees, and tucked her up in it waist deep. "Air's fresh," he said in vague apology. "Sure you're comfortable?" Phyllida, stroking the rich silver fox fur with a childish pleasure in its warmth and shaded gloss, murmured "Oh! very" with beaming eyes. "Is there anywhere in particular you want to go?" said Marqueray. It was a tolerably safe question, since Phyllida knew next to nothing of England.

"No, oh no, anywhere that's pretty and that ye like yourself," said Phyllida gently. "Only I must be back at six, not one minute after: I promised Mrs. Drew."

"Did you? That gives us three hours. Well, one can go fast and far in three hours. . . . You would like to get into the real country, my little Phyllida, wouldn't you?" The car crawled away down the High Street, and for some time a press of traffic kept him too busy to entertain Miss Browne, or so at least he said to her to account for his silence; in reality he could have talked as freely as on an open road, for his handling of the wheel had grown into second nature; but the proximity of Phyllida kept him quiet. She was still wearing the little gray suit and fur cap which she had bought with West's or Marqueray's money, but Mrs. Drew had lent her a gray fox wrap and muff, and a long fine veil, which caught the brim of her cap and the tip of her nose, and was crossed behind the rippings of her silken hair to be tied in a bow under her chin. This bow, the loose embroidered ends of which fluttered every now and then against his arm, inspired in Marqueray a desperate desire to kiss her, till Phyllida, vexed with it for fidgeting him, seized it and stuffed it into the bosom of her little coat.

The car gathered speed as they ran out southwest through the woody fringes of London under the dying fires of an autumn afternoon. Marqueray scarcely spoke at all,

and Phyllida was content to sit silent like a sympathetic mouse, watching the suburban acreage of red and brown park land or gray market garden flit away and give place to undulating country and grass-bordered roads, hanging woods, poplar arches, and fields of pale, glittering stubble. "Where are ye taking me?" she asked when they crossed a silver loop of the Thames. "Through Richmond and Kingston," Marqueray replied laconically. Well, if he didn't want to talk, Phyllida too could hold her tongue. She had never felt so serenely happy in her life, and she didn't even wonder why.

"Five minutes to four," said Marqueray, pointing to the car clock. "We've made pretty good time. I say, don't you want some tea? I do. Shall we get some here? It isn't such a bad little place."

"'Tis a darling place," said Phyllida. It was a hamlet of the Weald a mile or so from any main road, a score of red or whitewashed houses grouped about a straggling green; under the swinging sign of an inn, a farm hand watered his team of horses from a stone trough, and their brass chains glittered in a streak of sunshine that filtered through the red latticed branches of an apple orchard over a whitewashed wall; there was but one tiny general shop, and from a baker's cart tied up before the door of it came a hungry smell of hot bread. "'Tis a beloved little place," said Phyllida. "But I don't see where we would get any tea; unless we bought a loaf off the cart."

"There's the inn. I don't pretend it would rise above salt butter and stale cake. There is also"—Marqueray turned his head to smile down at Phyllida—"a week-end cottage of my own. How's that for a surprise? I come here now and then from Saturday to Monday when I can't stick London any longer. The place is shut up between whiles, but I have it kept habitable, and there's always tea and sugar in the cupboard.—But you don't like it? You

think you wouldn't be comfortable in a damp country cottage?"

"Oh! no, 't isn't that at all. I'm sure you wouldn't stay there if it wasn't comfortable."

"What then? Oh! the proprieties? Hang the proprieties! I always forget about them."

"Mrs. Drew said——"

"Of course she did. They always do. Well! be it so then, we'll try the Light Dragoon. I dare say they'll manage for us pretty well, there's a parlor of sorts behind the bar."

He was cheerful, but he was evidently vexed, and Phyllida's heart sank. She didn't want to vex Mr. Marqueray, she was far too grateful to him, and she could have said like Viola, "I hate ingratitude." This anxiety swayed her to an extent which Marqueray naturally never realized. He thought nothing at all of the trifling debt that had meant life and death to Phyllida.

"Which would you rather do?" she asked timidly.

"I? Oh, naturally, I'd rather go to my own small fire-side. But that doesn't signify at all, it's for you and you alone to choose. Please don't think of any one but yourself." His smile broke out again, humorous and mocking. "Be a nervous little girl if you like," it seemed to say. "I am twenty years older and fifty years wiser than you are, and I shall only be amused and not hurt or offended by a little girl's shyness."

"It would be great fun to picnic in your cottage," murmured Phyllida: "ever so much better fun than going to the inn."

"Are you sure West would like it?" said Marqueray. For his life he could not have said whether he was jeering at her, West, or himself.

"I'm sure Mr. West wouldn't mind where I went with you," answered Phyllida sincerely.

Marqueray bit his lip. But he restarted the car and they drove on past the sun-flecked green and by a white bridge over a running brook, until they reached a white wicket gate set in a dense dark wall of yew. Then Phyllida uttered a small cry of pleasure and surprise, for Marqueray's cottage pleased her; it would have pleased most people: it was really rather like the cottage that Red Ridinghood's grandmother lived in. It had once been a little old farmhouse, and its stepped gables and diamond panes were set in between a medley of barn roofs rich in stonecrop. From the wicket gate a flagged path led between plots of turf to a cut yew porch, and there were red and pink roses in the borders, and tufts of mignonette; and behind the policy, high on the fading eastern blue, rose up a screen of aspens, which kept a perpetual chinking on the stillest of still evenings, as if their branches, thinned by early frost, were strung with a multitude of silver coins which trembled all together in every breath of air.

Marqueray got out of the car and held open the wicket gate for Phyllida to go in. "What's it called?" she asked, looking round her like a good child who believes in fairy tales. "Noah's Ark," replied Marqueray. "Bustle about and get tea while I fetch a loaf and shove the car into the barn." He unlocked the door, which opened into a roomy cottage parlor. "Mrs. Gearing has lit the fire, good for her: I always have the place aired, and the little woman at the shop comes in every Saturday morning to tidy up because I never know when I shall take a fancy to run down here. Now see how clever you can be at laying the table before I get back, which will be in six minutes and a half."

If he had given Phyllida time to think, or if there had been any bronze lovers at Noah's Ark, she might have felt frightened again. But as it was she never thought of anything at all except what fun it was to be hunting at top speed through the drawers of a strange dresser for cloth

and napkins, knives and forks, teaspoons and butter knife. She flew into the kitchen—how spick and span it shone, and how Mr. Marqueray's aluminum pots and pans gleamed on the blue walls in the dancing firelight!—and filled a kettle from the hot tap and carried it back to boil on the parlor hob. She shook out her fine damask with mathematical precision, and set on the Queen Anne service and the sprigged old English cups and plates, and a pot of be-lated nasturtiums in the center of the table, because she loved their malachite tendrils and wide-lipped, fiery horns. Ransacking the cupboard for goodies, she found a comb of honey, cut it delicately from its frame, and arranged it in a sprigged bowl, while by way of variety she poured some of Marqueray's Oxford marmalade into a silver jar. She laid her own place at the head of the table, and for Marqueray at her right hand, opposite the wide cottage hearth, his back turned to the diamond lattice over which a wreath of silver clematis hung down, veiling the somber fires of sunset. She had opened the casement wide to let in the woody air, tinged, as it almost always is in autumn in the country, with the aromatic savor of weeds burning on a distant bonfire, and was on her knees brushing up the hearth by the time—punctual to the minute—when the master of the house came in.

"How quick you've been, and how charming you've made my tumbledown habitation!" Marqueray said, standing still on the threshold. Phyllida blushed and smiled; she had worked hard and had earned praise.

"The kettle's on the boil, but I wouldn't make the tea, though I found the caddy, because I know ye're fa—ye like it made your own way."

"Quite right," Marqueray grinned. "I'm faddy, and I like everything my own way." He dropped an armful of paper bags on the table. "Here's a twist. Don't you love twists? I knew you would. And half a pound of butter. Mustn't be extravagant. Also some home-made

cakes, gingery stuff, which Mrs. Gearing highly recommends. She says she made them herself so she knows they're good. Sort these things out on plates, please, Mary-Ann, while I attend to the teapot." He glanced at the open window. "No need to pull the blind down, is there? No one can see in."

"O no; and besides it wouldn't matter if they did," said Phyllida.

As indeed was not all the village welcome if it liked to come and watch her pouring out Marqueray's tea, and falling to with a school-girl appetite on his new bread and creamy butter and crisp, spicy cakes? They were all very good, quite as good as the bonbons from Fuller's that he had given her in Whitehall. "Faith, I like them better when I'm hungry," said Phyllida. "There's more to eat in them. All those sugary, icy, frothy things, your teeth go through them as if they weren't there, and ye don't feel as if ye'd eaten anything at all. Have a little more bread? A wee piecie? Half this with me?" Marqueray shook his head; he was not particularly hungry. "Well, there then," said Phyllida, crumbling the rejected morsel out of window for the sparrows, "we've nearly thirty minutes before we need be going. Will ye sit in the big chair by the fire and smoke while I wash up?"

"You needn't wash up," said Marqueray. "Mrs. Gearing will come in and clear away afterwards. Take the big chair yourself." He stood up, and the room fell silent. Only the flames crackled on the hearth and an old-fashioned hanging clock ticked loudly, swinging its brass weights to and fro. The black hand on the rose-painted dial stood at five-and-twenty minutes to five. Time to go or stay—go or stay—go or stay, said the clicking pendulum. His hour had now come, and he no longer felt any disinclination or constraint. "Unfasten your jacket, darling, or you'll catch cold when you go out." He opened

her coat and leaned his head down against the bunch of violets that Mrs. Drew had pinned into her blouse.

"Oh . . . oh, please . . ."

Marqueray had entirely and in a moment thrown off the mask. There was nothing subtle in his wooing of Phyllida; he seized her in his arms and buried his face among her violets. "You don't want to go back to Mrs. Drew to-night. Stay with me. I know you want to stay."

"O no—no—no——"

"Is that your conscience speaking? What a feeble little voice! I wouldn't listen to it if I were you. Leave me the responsibility, my shoulders are broad enough to bear your small sins as well as my own. . . . Let me take your veil off; I have been hating it so all the way from town."

"Mr. Marqueray, d'ye mean—do you—are you——?"

"I adore you," said Marqueray.

He dragged off her veil and cap and began to take the pins out of her hair, shaking it down in loose ringlets. Where now were Phyllida's golden fancies? They all scattered under his licentious touch, leaving her to face the old gray world of man's brutality and scorn. Unable even to cry, she sat still, compliant apparently, and an easy conquest: too easy, for his deliberate taste: and while he let his head fall amid the scent of her curls, his judgment was registering a black mark against her for her significant facility. His imagination, though keen, had never gone far down the weary way of Phyllida's life. He could not—no man can—read the soul of a woman who has carried month after month under her heart a child that she will have to bear in shame. Young as she was, Phyllida was inured to insult, and had scarcely any hope of escaping Marqueray. But when he raised himself to her lips she turned her face from him.

"Ye can take me by force if ye must," she said; "no other way."

"Take you by force!"

" 'Tisn't much use me trying to stop you, I know the way men use women when they fight. Ye've brought me here alone, the fool I was to come with you, and warned the way I was yesterday, too, only I didn't think ye'd be so cruel, no I didn't. But ye'll have to hurt me very much before . . ."

"But why not?" said Marqueray stupidly. He was thrown out by the unexpected check. "Am I physically repellent to you?" Phyllida's eyes remained blank. "Well, do you hate the look of me?"

"O no: not so very much."

Piqued, and conscious of his natural advantages, he held her from him, a flush on his cheek. "I've received warmer compliments! Hang it, I'm a better-looking fellow any day than a paralytic little sweep like March!"

"Ye're not so very handsome, Mr. Marqueray. Your face is too red."

Oh bathos! He threw back his head and laughed, but half against his will. "Is that why you don't love me? It's only sunburn, darling, it'll wear off in the winter. I shall be quite fair by January." He laid his cheek against hers. "Oh Phyl, you can't send me away because I'm sunburnt! Shut, shut your eyes, hide them against my heart; it aches so, you might be kind to it. Why won't you come to me?"

"Come to you, is it? Come to you to-night, and to the river in the morning! . . . Ye forget, Mr. Marqueray, ye're not the first man that has made love to me."

Light dawned at length on Marqueray, an ugly light. "Oh! is that all?"

He gave a short laugh. "So stupid of me not to think of it, but the omission is soon rectified. Merely an oversight, I assure you. How much is your price?"

"My——?"

"Oh, let us understand each other," said Marqueray,

smiling at her with his hard blue eyes. "I never take anything by force. If you stay here with me you can't return to the vicarage, and naturally a woman who is prudent as well as pretty likes to guard against contingencies. I am a rich man, my dear, we won't quarrel about terms. What did Marchmont pay you?" The sense of his words was slow to penetrate Phyllida's mind. "March!" he laughed. "I'm not accustomed to think of March as my rival. I'm not so well off as he is, but I'd beggar myself to pay your price, which is more than he would do. Well, what is it now, Phyllida? darling? sweetest, fairest, why are you so unkind to me?" he was jibing now at her and now at himself. "Say what you like, only don't keep me waiting——"

"Oh, cruel! Don't then, I can't bear it, I'd sooner die——"

She broke his self-control utterly as no force before had ever broken it: his promise to West was forgotten and even his promise to her of a moment ago. "Then come because I love you. Let there be no more talk of money between me and thee. Trust me: before God I won't fail you. You shall have everything but my name. My darling, my darling, I love you——"

"No. Oh Holy Virgin, help me!"

The clock was ticking on towards five, the sun had gone down behind a hill, it was growing dark: dancing firelight struck prismatic sparkles from Phyllida's mantle of hair, and the smell of the violets crushed on her breast came to him with a poignant sweetness. "Rubbish!" said Marqueray savagely, "you weren't so faddy when you were Marchmont's mistress."

"Ye see, I thought I was his wife."

CHAPTER XIV

Hang there like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die.

“**W**AIT a minute,” said Marqueray.

He left Phyllida and ran upstairs to his room. It was prepared and trim, a big fire sparkling on the hearth, the gable windows open, and a bowl of chrysanthemums blooming on the wide, low sill. Marqueray shuddered. He was not given to prayer, or to faith in overruling forces that save a man from the result of his own actions, but now he felt inclined to fall on his knees in dim gratitude for a merciful escape. He was badly shaken, but he had to get himself in hand again, and a cold douche was the quickest way of doing it; and taking off his collar he splashed some water into a basin and bathed his face and head and neck. When he had toweled himself more or less dry and brushed down his hair he felt a good deal more like himself, and he ran down again to Phyllida. She had not stirred; she was still sitting in her chair by the hearth, leaning her small head on her hand, while the leaping flame-light played in iridescent sparkles over her loose, dark curls. With anguish Marqueray saw that she began to tremble when he came in; she was afraid of him.

“Why didn’t you run away while I was out of the room?” he asked her.

“I’d nowhere to run to. I’d no money in me purse.”

Marqueray was pierced afresh. She was indeed helpless: West’s indignation came back into his mind, and with it West’s warning. Yes, he could take his own way with her if he liked, she would not struggle much, and if she

cried out there was no one to hear; but she would scarcely even cry out—there would be one or two little petitions to the Virgin, and then silence, and the surrender of the helplessly broken will. The surrender of the bird with the broken wing. In five minutes . . . in ten . . .

He mastered himself. "Phyllida," he said, sitting down and leaning forward in an oak chair on the other side of the hearth, his hands clasped lightly between his knees, "look at me." Phyllida, docile, threw back her silken veil and raised her head. She was feeling very unhappy. Inured as she was to insult, it came ever fresh from a fresh hand, and Marqueray's whip had torn open all her old wounds. She had thought that he at least, he and Mr. West, would give her credit for trying to be good, but apparently there could be no goodness left in a girl that had been Marchmont's mistress. What was going to happen to her now she didn't know, and her spirit was so broken that she didn't even care: since it had come to this, that Mr. Marqueray touched her roughly and offered her money, the sooner she was out of a cruel world the better. Oh! men! Well, if he was cruel she would soon be out of it: she was tough and had borne a great deal from Marchmont, but she dimly felt that her heart would soon stop beating under Marqueray's touch. But when she looked up, she was startled out of her apathy. What had come to Mr. Marqueray? It might have been a stranger, this tall man in blue serge, with his hair dark and damp from recent immersion, and his gentle manner and brilliant blind eyes.

"What is it, Phyllida? Are you afraid of me?"

"'Es," said Miss Browne with her little nod, but in an uncertain voice.

"Well, don't be. I'm not dangerous any more," said Marqueray. "In my sane and sober senses it isn't my way to bully a woman, and I'm very sorry I was rude to you, but I hope you'll forgive me because I didn't understand."

If I give you my word of honor to sit quiet and behave quite goodly, could you trust me enough to tell me more about that time in Italy?"

"I promised Mrs. Drew I'd be in by six o'clock."

"Will she be very angry?"

" 'Tisn't that, 'tis that I promised. But if ye keep me here it won't signify anyway, because I won't live after it. I don't know whether you would mind that, perhaps not; they say men are often glad when the women die that they've got into trouble, but anyway ye can't prevent it. Nobody," said Phyllida, gathering firmness from this consolatory reflection, "can make one live if one would rather not. There's plenty of ways of dying, and some are very easy."

"Your knowledge of the world, my dear, is extensive and peculiar. But don't you worry your small head, you aren't going to die just yet. The milk is spilt for six o'clock, but you shan't be very late, and I'll see Mrs. Drew and tell her it was my fault."

Phyllida opened incredulous eyes. "Ye won't tell her that!"

"Oh yes, I will," said Marqueray, smiling. "If necessary I'll tell her that I behaved to you like an insolent hound and that you very properly put me in my place."

"Indeed ye won't," said Phyllida,—“where are me pins, please?—I wouldn't have you mortify yourself like that, Mr. Marqueray.” She drew herself slowly erect like a flower reviving and began to coil up her hair; not yet certain of escape, scarcely daring even to hope for it. “What is it ye want to know about Italy?”

“Will you tell me what you meant just now by saying that you thought you were Marchmont's wife?”

“But I don't understand: d'ye think I'd ever, ever have set foot out of doors with him else?”

“Did he promise to marry you?”

“Promise to marry me?” Phyllida cried: “he did marry

me! only 'twas no marriage, but how was I to know that, a girl like me that had never been out of Ballyhanna? We were married in the old ruined chapel in the middle of the bogs; there was no one there but him and me and the priest that married us, and no banns read, but I never troubled for that—he said we were married by license, and I never dreamed he'd be so wicked as to tell me a lie. Never, never did I dream of it or he breathe a word of it till he had me far away in Italy with no one to take care of me or take my part."

"He took you to Italy as his wife?"

She was suddenly very angry. "Mr. Marqueray, how dare you? D'ye think me father's daughter was never educated to know right from wrong? Sure it's true what Father Ryan used to say, that when a woman's once done wrong men all think they can do as they please with her. But it isn't my fault that I'm a fallen woman," Phyllida said, beginning to weep bitterly, "but ye're like Hamon's friends, they seemed to think it didn't matter what they said to me while I was living with him."

"Oh, my darling, don't," said Marqueray.

He got out his handkerchief and went down on one knee to dry her eyes. "Phyllida, don't cry; you'll make me weep too in a minute, and you won't like that, I shall frighten you. Don't, dear, don't. Raise your head, your pretty head: that's better: what, I'm not to touch you? Oh, my sweet, if you would only let me take care of you, neither Marchmont nor any other man should ever make you cry again. Did they dare——? Never mind that now." He threw himself into his chair again. "Go on, darling; I didn't mean to be rude, but I want to hear every detail. You were married—a sham marriage, I suppose—in the chapel in the bogs. Why on earth didn't you have the service in your own church and your own priest to marry you?"

Phyllida hung her head. "Because I was wicked. I

knew Father Ryan didn't want to marry us, and I was afraid to tell him. That's where I did do wrong, and I deserved all that happened to me afterwards. Ye see, when I began meeting Hamon I told Father Ryan, and he was in a great taking, he wrote to me cousins in Dublin to come and fetch me away. I think now that he knew more about Hamon than he cared to tell me when I was a young girl and not married, but o' course I didn't understand that then, and I was cross with him, and when Hamon said he'd bring a priest of his own I said, Very well, and I'd snap me fingers at Father Ryan. I never knew ye could be married and yet not married. He had a little drink taken, but that might happen to any one."

"And after the marriage what happened?"

"Hamon had his car waiting, and we took the train and crossed over to Holyhead, and then we came up to London and stayed two days at an hotel that I don't remember what it was called, but it was very expensive: we had an enormous room and a dressing-room and a bathroom and private sitting-rooms, but I don't know what they charged us, except Hamon said I was to eat a good lunch because the day before we paid thirty-four and six for the two of us, and he hadn't eaten up to that. He never went anywhere but first class and a reserved carriage, think of it!"

"I am thinking of it." The self-torturing question forced its way to Marqueray's lips—"Were you very much in love with him, Phyllida?"

"I never was in love with him the way I've seen other people," said Phyllida reflectively, "to like to hold his hand and all that nonsense, but he was very kind to me *then*, and after the first shock of it I didn't mind so much as I did afterwards, because I was so busy buying clothes and driving about to see the sights. Between whiles I used to forget about him. Ye see, being his wife I thought it was me duty to—to put up with him, and I did try to be a good—well, I wasn't a wife—to him. Ye've always got to

put up with something." Marqueray felt a little consoled: it would have been difficult for the most exacting rival to quarrel with Phyllida's description of her attitude.

"And after that you went to Italy?"

"'Es; we had a palace on an island on Lago Maggiore, and at first I was almost happy there. It was so lovely, and Hamon was away a great deal, and even when he came home I didn't mind him so very much: he used to row me on the lake: often we stayed out till the moon was up, and then we would have supper together, queer Italian things, risotto, and polenta, and fruit he picked for me in the garden——"

"Go on a bit, tell me what happened next."

"Well, 'twas not long after that the trouble began. He got to know some people that were staying at an hotel on the shore, Englishy people, a lot of men that used to come to the house and sometimes ladies with them, that's if ye can call them ladies: I'm sure Mrs. Barry wouldn't: and he took to getting impatient with me for not doing things like every one else, and he said I wasn't civil to his friends—Well, I wasn't always: would you be civil to a woman that had white and pink paint all over her an inch thick and black paint inside her nose?"

"Certainly not."

"O' course not—but he liked it, and he'd call me a wild Irish girl that ought to go to school again to be finished, and then he'd say things about papa and Father Ryan: once he called papa a damned Irish rebel, and another time he said Father Ryan was an ignorant old ass that had only brains enough to choose a pretty cook—and o' course I knew what *that* meant, and I told him it wasn't true and that Father Ryan's cook was as ugly as sin and lame in the bargain."

"And what did he say to that?" inquired Marqueray.

"Oh! he said that only showed Father Ryan hadn't as much brains as he thought. Ye couldn't get even with

Hamon," confessed Phyllida; "he'd sit and laugh at you, and when he was in a bad temper he'd egg on the other men, and they'd be all in it together till I didn't know if I was on me head or me heels."

"By-the-bye, what did the other men call you?"

"Just Lady Marchmont, or sometimes Phyllida: I couldn't prevent their taking liberties: and I can see now they knew all along I wasn't Lady Marchmont at all. But don't you think they might have been polite to me anyway? I'm sure Mr. West would, even if he didn't know I didn't know I wasn't Lady Marchmont."

"Swine," said Marqueray between his teeth.

"But ye were no better yourself," Phyllida pointed out.

Marqueray dropped down again and touched with his lips the slight ankle that showed white through her cheap cotton stockings. He shook from head to foot. "No, I'm no better myself."

"Mr. Marqueray, get up!" said Phyllida, scandalized, and tucking her feet under her. "Ye just are mad!"

"Nearly." He leaned his head against her knee. "No, I'm very sane and sober—and sick, too, as Aubrey foretold. Go on, dear, but don't tell me more than you need. Cut it, to where you left him."

"Me? I never left him!"

"Not? I thought perhaps you would when you found out."

"Didn't get any chance," said Phyllida with a gleam of sour mirth. "It all happened in two days, after we'd been there a long time, when we weren't there at all any more. We'd moved on to—what's that place they gamble so at? Monte Carlo. I'd been m—living with him then eight months, and"—she hesitated—"I don't know how to tell you——"

"Tell me anything. I'm as safe as the priest, dear."

"Ye're not so very like a priest, Mr. Marqueray."

"I wish you would call me Dan."

"Is that your name for short? G. Danvers—ye put it on that bit of paper ye wrote for me. What's G.?"

"George. Every one calls me Dan. You might do it, I should like you to."

"But you're so much older. I think 'Mr. Marqueray' sounds more respectful from me to you."

"I don't particularly want you to be respectful to me, Phyllida."

"But I think 'Mr. Marqueray' sounds more proper."

"Call me what you like," said Marqueray abruptly. "Never mind that now. Go on—what was it? Something you didn't know how to tell me——"

"I wasn't so pretty as I had been, ye see," said Phyllida gently.

Marqueray stared at her with bright, expressionless eyes.

"Oh ah; I forgot. And he resented it? He would."

"And I wasn't so patient; there were faults on both sides: when ye don't always feel so very well, 'tis hard to be patient. And it was difficult with the men he brought to the house. I didn't like coming down, the way they'd be looking at me: and one day I heard one of them chaffing Hamon about his family responsibilities. He hated that," said Miss Browne simply. "He hated to have any sort or kind of responsibility put on him. So he threw a decanter at me and turned me out."

This abrupt conclusion took Marqueray by surprise. "A decanter? Marchmont threw a decanter at you?"

"He asked me to drive with him and some other people, and I said I couldn't, and he said I was to, and I said I wouldn't,—which was wrong of me,—so then he lost his temper and picked up the decanter and threw it at me and hit me; and I said that was no way to behave to one's wife; and he said I was not his wife at all and never had been, and he threw some money on the cloth and told me to pick that up and clear out. He said," pursued Phyl-

lida evenly, "that I was his mistress and a damned dull mistress, too."

"He was at all events not dull," said Marqueray. "Life with him must have been quite eventful. What did you do?"

"I fainted, and the servants found me when they came in to clear away."

"But you said he turned you out?"

"Yes, but that wasn't that day, that was the day after; and he didn't exactly turn me out either, he left me at a railway station." Marqueray found no observation to make. "Nina—my maid, such a darling girl, an Italian—put me to bed, and he never came near me, but the next morning he came into me room and told me to get up and pack. I felt very ill, but I got up and Nina packed for me and dressed me, and Hamon took me away alone with him in a car. Nina cried when he wouldn't let her come; she asked him if he was going to murder the signora: faith I thought so too! We drove for two hours before we took the train, and then we traveled all day, and in the evening we got out at a big station I'd never seen before, and Hamon took me to a *salle d'attente* and said I was to sit there and wait for him; and so I did: hours: but he never came, and by that time I didn't know what was happening to me. At last, it was the middle of the night, some one spoke to me, and after that I don't remember any more, only that when I was better they told me he'd gone on to Vienna leaving me behind."

"He deserted you?—Had you any money? Where was the place?"

"Innsbrück. I expect he chose it because I hadn't any German; me papa taught me French, and I'd picked up some Italian, but we'd never been to Germany before"—"Austria," suggested Marqueray,—"Well, Austria then, 'tis all one, they both fought against us in the war and they weren't friendly to us. But they were kind to me. I

think they were sorry for me. The station-master put me in a cab and drove me to the British Consulate. The consul was a lamb. The things he said of Hamon," continued Phyllida pensively, "when he thought I wasn't sensible, it really was a pleasure to me to hear. He put me with some English ladies to be nursed, and I was there two months. They were angelic, too, and they wanted me to stay till me baby was born. But I'd only two hundred francs in me purse and a little silver, and though ten marks a week isn't dear" (Marqueray made a mental note to write and inquire into this arrangement), "it soon ran away, and I couldn't get any work to do in Innsbrück, so I said I'd go back to Ireland. They begged me not to, but I couldn't live on their money, and I made them let me go. But on me way across London I was taken very ill suddenly, and the police sent me to the workhouse infirmary, and there me little boy was born, and—and you know what happened after that."

"After that you fell into my hands. How old are you, Phyl?"

"I'm in me twenty-first year. I was nineteen when I ran away with Hamon."

"Jump up out of that chair for a moment," said Marqueray. Phyllida made no demur: she looked a little surprised when he dropped into it himself, but not particularly resentful. Marqueray stretched out his arms to her—"Come here to me, Phyllida." She hesitated as if meditating flight, but he drew her down: she was so small and slender that she weighed no more than a child of twelve, and he held her to his breast and touched her hair with his lips, surrendering to the deep peace of heart that springs of renewed faith in one beloved. Doubt had been anguish, but he was purged of all doubt now, and only wondered how he could have been so blind before. He knew too much of the world to feel no personal regrets: his cold judgment and tenacious family pride forewarned him that

he would have to face some stinging humiliations, as well as a tussle with Robert Vere; but he cared so much more for Phyllida than for himself that he was glad to stoop his strong shoulders under the same burden that she had borne. Finesse and all, Marqueray was simple at heart. He came home to Phyllida like a tall ship that casts anchor in a desired haven.

But though Phyllida, feeling the change in him, lay passive in a clasp which was as gentle as West's could have been, she still turned her flower-soft face away from him. "My bird," said Marqueray in the deepened voice of tenderness, "turn round to me." But he could not move her, no: the tractable, meek thing defied him. "Do you think I would hurt you?" Marqueray murmured: "no, but you'll have to let me take care of you; you're such a little thing, do you imagine I shall ever let you go to fight the world alone again? Back to the excellent Mrs. Drew? Well; you can go back to her now if you like: you shall do whatever you like; but it won't be for long. Did you know you were going to marry me?" Phyllida was speechless. "It is a tail-foremost way of proposing," Marqueray confessed, "but I can't help it. Give me the right to protect you. Thank Heaven I can do it: people will think twice before throwing stones at my wife."

"Ye won't marry me."

"I would crawl on all fours to Newcastle to marry you. What whim have you got in that small child's head of yours which is lying on my heart? Stop thinking at once, it's a bad habit. Why do you look so frightened?"

"I don't want to marry any one. It hurts too—too much."

"Are you afraid it will be Marchmont over again? I'll make you forget him. I'm rather a sweep, Phyl, but I'm not—I'm not like March. I do know how to be gentle to any one I love. Can't you trust me not to hurt you? Am I hurting you now?"

"No—but ye did before, and ye would again. I know what men are."

"Is it marriage itself you're afraid of?" Marqueray gave a sigh so deep that it was almost a groan: this was the child in whose innocence he had refused to believe. He was very grave and frank with her now. "But that is all right when people care for each other. Oh love of mine, little love, if you could read my heart you wouldn't be afraid! You look as if you loved me a little, and truly, Phyl, I think you do. Perhaps I understand you better than you understand yourself. Would you rather go? Leave me, then." He opened his arms. "Well, my bird, why don't you leave me? You're as free as air, and yet you stay here, it seems to me, lying on my breast with your sweet face against my heart. Isn't that because you like staying there? Say you love me, Phyl. Whisper! I so want to hear it. Come now—'Dan,' or no, if you prefer it, 'Mr. Marqueray, I love you.'"

"Ah no, no, no! . . . and if I did, d'ye think I'd marry you, the way people would say Dan Marqueray had done for himself marrying Marchmont's leavings?"

"Good God!" Her echo of his own words to West was perhaps the sharpest stab Marqueray had ever endured. "Don't say such things."

"They're true. Ye think I'm a child, but I'm in me twenty-first year, and I've lived six months with another man. The men that saw me with him will never forget that. Ye'll never forget it yourself, never, never, never. And if I were your wife, I'd remember it every day, every hour."

"You're remembering it now, and yet you're content to stay where you are."

"Ye take all the strength out o' me," said Phyllida brokenly.

She turned her face against his shoulder and wept again, and this time Marqueray did not dry her eyes for her. He

leaned back in the big chair, one arm thrown over her as she lay on his bosom, the other hand absently stroking her hair. It was like holding a child on one's knee: but what a rigid, unmalleable force there was in this flower-soft creature! And what a power she had over him! Marqueray was not often tired, but he was tired now; an immense lassitude had fallen on him, a depressed weariness of life. He could not bend her to his will, no: in her way she was as strong as himself; he could have killed her with a touch, but he could not force an assent from her lips, those sweet lips with their pathetic, childish droop. And yet to let her go was hard, harder even for her sake than for his own: dimly he foresaw that when his deadly lassitude wore off he would begin to desire her again, and the torment of the last few days would renew itself, but to-night, while she lay on his bosom, he could think only of what this refusal would mean for her. She was not fit to take care of herself. Modern women as a rule—Marqueray was indifferent to modern women—can fight for their own hand, but Phyllida was different. For her there was but one way of joy: to be treasured as a jewel, as a flower, as a bird in the nest of a man's passionate and devoted tenderness. Marqueray could have given her precisely that. Her small fingers, weak yet inflexibly strong, seemed to be twisted in his nerves. Pity ached in his heart till he knew not how to bear its unremitting pain.

"What's the matter?" said Phyllida, raising her head and speaking in an altered voice.

Marqueray sat up and put her from him. He covered his face with his hand, and after a minute he pulled himself to his feet and went over to the window. Phyllida followed him.—"Turn round," she said. Marqueray complied, but he kept his hand over his eyes. "Oh dear, what is the matter?" said Phyllida, her own tears frightened back to their source.

"I told you you would make me weep, too." Marqueray

put his other hand into hers. "Don't be frightened, I am all right, or shall be in a minute."

"But what is it? what are ye crying for?" said Phyllida; "oh dear, ye're so tall I can't reach you! Sit down on the window-sill a minute; let me move the chrysanthemums: there now, there's no one to see but me; ye don't mind me." He did, exceedingly. "What is it, Dan dear? Ye're not crying because I wouldn't have you?" It had not occurred to Phyllida that Marqueray would suffer under her refusal till she caught the broken gasp—"so sorry for you"—as she drew down his head. "For me? Is that it? Because of Hamon?—*Dan!*" She leapt back as if a grenade had exploded in her face. "Ye mustn't—ye truly mustn't be so wicked. I don't know *what* Father Ryan'd say!"

But Marqueray had uttered only three words, which he conceived that Father Ryan would have endorsed. He got up with a rather wintry smile and a difficult return to his ordinary manner. "I'll go and get the car out now." He moved towards the door. "We shall have a dark run back to town. No, my dear, don't keep me; we've had enough sentiment for the present." He had had enough and to spare: his self-control had not slipped since he was fifteen, and he was red with shame. "Put on your hat and jacket, and stuff some biscuits into your pocket; you'll be hungry before we get to Harlesden, and I suppose it won't do for me to dine you anywhere, if you won't have me."

"But, Dan——"

"Well, my dear?" He was just going out, but he turned on the threshold, and at a sign from Phyllida he came back to her.

"But I want to know," said Phyllida, taking him by the hand and examining his flushed face, "were ye truly crying?"

"I think I was, Phyl."

"But why?"

"Let me go and get the car now, dear."

"Ye just are shy, Dan. . . . But what does it signify when it's only me?" Marqueray stood disarmed before her. "Ah, tell me, I do want to know! 'Tisn't only for teasing," Phyllida murmured between reproach and coaxing. "Ye said ye'd always do what I asked."

"Your little story, my dear, is difficult for a man who loves you to listen to with composure. I'm sorry March made you suffer so, and I'm still more sorry that you won't give me the right to protect you from all suffering in future."

"Suffering never hurt any one yet," said Phyllida. "And ye can't protect me from it, Dan: it'll come, if it wants to come, and there's no one but the Blessed Virgin that will be able to help me out of it. But we must all take what comes, and if ye want me so badly as all that, I suppose ye'll have to have me. I never thought of your minding. 'Tis running to meet mischief, and o' course your relations will be very angry, but I can't have you crying anyway. . . . Now ye had better get the car out. Unless ye would like to have a little supper here before we go back? Ye had no tea, and I did see a ham in the larder."

"What about Mrs. Drew?"

"'Tis different if I'm an engaged woman," Miss Browne replied sedately. "Me first duty is to you."

CHAPTER XV

Be ruled by me; forget to think of her.

MARQUERAY took Phyllida back to Harlesden and made her excuses to Mrs. Drew. He had to confess to his engagement, and was made to stay to supper, a restless, informal meal prefaced by a Latin grace for which Marqueray mechanically crossed himself. When he got away, it was ten o'clock, and he had never felt less like sleep in his life. He went to Wellwood Square.

Vere was smoking by firelight, his favorite dog, a tall Russian Borzoi, sitting by his side and leaning a snaky head on his knee. Vere did not move when Marqueray came in except to point to an opposite chair. Marqueray sat down and stretched out his hand, but the Borzoi turned solemn, hazel eyes on him and thumped the floor with an apologetic tail and refused to budge. "No, he stays with me," said Vere, stroking the silken ears. "He's not fickle. What have you been doing with yourself? I haven't set eyes on you for a week."

"You saw me two days ago, in Piccadilly."

"Oh, no," Vere laughed. "I didn't see you then." He added with unaffected carelessness, "Pretty little girl, Dan. Mind what you're about."

Marqueray leaned across to light his cigar from his uncle's. It was impossible to tell from his expression whether he had heard what Vere said or not. He threw himself back in his chair and crossed his knees. Silence fell, a long, companionable silence. Marqueray broke it by beginning to whistle a soft little plaintive air under his breath. "Don't do that," said Vere.

"Sorry, was I out of tune? I never know, you know."

A gift which he had failed to inherit from his uncle was Vere's sensitive passion for music. Vere smiled. "No, it wasn't that this time. But you remind me too much of your father now and then. Poor George! You picked that tune up from him. He used to whistle it about the house. Time and again I've heard him."

"What is it?"

"You wouldn't be much wiser if I told you it was 'God Save the King.' It's a Volga boat song. Pretty, like all folk-music; and melancholy, like all Russian music."

"You seem in a melancholy mood yourself to-night," Marqueray remarked. "What's the matter, sir?"

"Nothing. I'm growing old, and when I sit by myself in the dark I see ghosts. Why don't you get married? I should like to watch the olive branches growing up before I go."

"Bobby, you have an indelicate mind." Marqueray got up and stretched himself, while Vere's eyes traveled over him in dispassionate appreciation of his lithe strength. "If I ever did get married, it would be for the vine and not for the olive branches. I don't want any children."

"You'll have them fast enough if you marry."

"It's a dangerous thing to do."

"For the mother, you mean?" Vere asked, puzzled.

"For the children," Marqueray answered with his wintry smile. "By the way, I've often meant to ask you: who was responsible for sending me to Spurling's?"

"Spurling's? That private school you were at before you went to Eton? I'm sure I don't know. Your father's lawyer arranged it, I suppose: I was in Russia at the time and knew nothing of it except that it was supposed to be a crack establishment, excellent testimonials and so forth, and there was some idea that you weren't strong enough for public school life. You had had some sort of sickness, scarlet fever or, no, influenza, that was it, and your heart was supposed to be weak."

"So they sent me to Spurling's because I had a weak heart? I didn't know that," said Marqueray.

He crossed his arms on the mantelpiece and stood looking down into the fire. "Do you remember the day you came to see me there after you got back from Persia?"

"Well enough. You startled me: I hadn't realized what a big fellow I should find you. Somehow I went expecting to see the same bullet-headed youngster I left five years before. You were the image of your father at fifteen: more like him then than you are now, because you've lost that queer boyish look in the eyes that poor George kept to the end. What's the word? Wistful—like a woman—like Vanya here when he's thinking of his dinner. It's an ill-omened look: I've seen it in other men's eyes, and it generally meant a smash of some sort, or an early death, like poor George. I didn't like it in you. But you've lost it now."

Marqueray kicked the brands together with his foot. "I don't wonder I had it then."

"Why? Were you unhappy at Spurling's?" Marqueray did not answer. "You never told me so at the time. But you wouldn't: youngsters never do. What's brought it back to your mind? Have you been seeing ghosts, too?"

Marqueray shrugged his shoulders. He was not sufficiently versed in psychological phenomena to know that the storms which shake a man's nature will often recall forgotten passions and sufferings, like the deep-sea ooze and weed which gales cast up among Atlantic surges. It was long since he had thought of the Reverend James Spurling: but memories of the three formative years spent in that paternal care were running in his head to-night.

"What happened at Spurling's? Did you get beaten, Dan?"

"Oh—what's the odds? It's twenty years ago."

Vere's hand, ceaselessly stroking Vanya's ears, checked

and lay still. He glanced up at Marqueray. "George's son—and I left you to fight through it by yourself! Why didn't you write to me?"

"Persia is a long way off. Besides, I was only fifteen when I left, an age when one fights for one's own hand. Nichevo—it doesn't matter," Marqueray smiled philosophically at his uncle. "You took me away in time: I couldn't have stood much more of it. But it did me no harm. It was early to begin fighting, but I'm not sorry I went through it. There aren't many things in my life that I regret. One or two, perhaps. Bobby, did you ever get into serious trouble with a woman?"

"I've never asked you that," said Vere.

"I beg your pardon."

"These boys! You're not original, you young men: you all ask us the same question—whether we were ever young."

Vere got up, and Vanya with him, nestling his head against his master's thigh and making a faint sound of distress. Vere's fingers ran down over his silken shoulders, pressing him to his side, comforting him, assuring him of his permanent regard. Marqueray, to tide over a difficult moment, stretched out his hand again to caress the restless creature; but Vanya drew back, and bared his teeth.

"Down, Vanya!" said Vere very sharply.

"Got a queer temper, that dog," said Marqueray tranquilly. "Jealous, I suppose."

" . . . But it's not a breach of delicacy," Vere took up the conversation where he had dropped it, "because you don't want an answer. You only ask me the question that you want me to ask you. I will if you like. I'm always interested in your concerns. Quiet, Vanya, old fellow; civilities must be accepted with civility. Go on, Dan; who is she?"

"Who is who?"

"The woman you want to talk to me about."

Marqueray had come to Wellwood Square determined to

tell Vere the story of his relations with Phyllida. It had to be done soon or late, and he had thought it would be more easily done in hot blood. But he could not do it in hot blood or cold. He took Vanya by the forepaws and lifted him up till the small patrician head was on a level with his own. "He'd fly at me if he dared," he remarked.

"He'd fly at you if I let him, you mean. Now drop it: I won't have the dog teased."

Marqueray instantly released Vanya. "He's a handsome fellow. Wants a whipping all the same." He stood for a moment in silence. The clock struck. "Hullo! past twelve. I didn't know it was so late." He turned towards the door.

"Are you going, Dan?"

"Time enough, isn't it? I've left my car standing outside."

Vere watched him go. He believed he knew roughly what Marqueray had been trying to say, and he was not anxious to receive his nephew's confidence. "So like George!" he reflected, as Dan went out. "What he says he'll stick to. Hence, if it's an indiscretion, one had better not let him say it. But she was a pretty woman, that little thing with him in the car. *Et ego*—I've known some pretty women in my life. They manage these things better in your world, Vanya, old fellow."

Delighted to get rid of a disturbing presence, Vanya laid his head again on Vere's knee.

CHAPTER XVI

When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.

THE next day was Saturday. West did not go to work as usual because Yarborough rang him up at breakfast and despatched him first to the Record Office to track down an obscure historical allusion, and next to take notes of a committee meeting in West Ham. He spent a dull morning of industrious deviling, lunched in Wellwood Square, learned a good deal more from Robert Vere about Dan's foreign activities than he would ever have learned from Dan, and returned to duty at two o'clock. When he entered the room assigned to him as chief private secretary, he found it occupied by Yarborough and his daughter and a man from Scotland Yard, engaged in discussing what Yarborough called "the Mile End shindy."

The circle opened to admit West with a careless interchange of "Good morning's." Yarborough was irritable; Goss, the police superintendent, was haughtily apologetic; Val, called in to contribute evidence, was mildly sticking to it that the opposition had been personal and organized. West, sitting down, was inclined to pooh-pooh the whole affair. He said that the district was notoriously rough, and that theirs was by no means the first meeting which had been scientifically wrecked. Yarborough, whose arm was tied up in a silk sling, declined to take a mild view of a riot in which six or eight people had been seriously injured and his own shoulder wrenched and bruised; and Val, having asked after what she tactfully called West's face, remarked on Sir Roger Dane's authority that Aubrey

would have been badly knocked about if Mr. Marquerau had not turned up in the nick of time. Dane had said that the missile which hit the Chairman was aimed at West.

In the middle of the dispute, Marquerau sent up his card. Yarborough sat turning it about for a minute between his finger and thumb: he showed it to Val with the gleam of a shrewd, amused smile: finally he tossed it to his secretary, consulting West with his eyes.

"Shall I go down to him, sir?" West suggested. He did not think that Marquerau would care to meet Goss.

Yarborough took a short cut to the same end. "Well, thanks very much for calling," he said in his suavest voice, and Goss found himself on his feet and shortly after on his way to the door. As he left the room, Yarborough nodded to the servant, and soon Marquerau was shown in. West eyed him keenly. West had made time on Friday to go to Harlesden, but the Drews were in church, and the bare news that Phyllida had gone out for the afternoon left him feeling uncomfortable. He knew Marquerau's power of swift action. He would have liked ten private words with Marquerau. But he could read nothing under Marquerau's cheerful smile, and such considerations had to be postponed for the present.

Dropping into a chair and crossing one leg over the other, Marquerau began by making polite inquiries after the Minister's arm—was it better? And Miss Yarborough was none the worse for her, he wouldn't say shock? Good! He was glad to hear it. Then—"I promised you yesterday, Mr. Yarborough, that I'd give you the name of the beggar who ran the show. I can give it you now. I spent my night going over the information you gave me and my morning in the City. Am I to speak before Miss Yarborough and West? Be it so.—I've made a rough draft of the points against my man." He flung a sheet of manuscript on the table. "Yes, really I haven't the least doubt who

it is that has been making himself objectionable. Do you guess, Aubrey?—Nor you, Miss Yarborough?—Yet we saw him on the night.”

“Marchmont!” said West.

“Yes, our little friend March. Odd, isn’t it, Aubrey, that you and I seem to be up against him all along the line? I hadn’t been five days in town, you remember, before I ran across him and you that night by Victoria Gardens. No, one wouldn’t suspect him of a political design. But his interests are entirely non-political,” said Marqueray with an ungenial smile. “Do you know, sir, that Marchmont is up to his neck in Peruvian copper? It is trading profits that are at the bottom of the trouble. The terms that you’re concluding with the Peruvian Government will mean for him a drop from ten per cent. to two per cent. March is behind Hager and Lindau. In fact, he is Hager and Lindau.”

“Who the devil are Hager and Lindau?”

“The biggest German mining agency in Southern Peru. The Germanophil members of the present Government have always been sympathetic to them, and the Minister of Railways is in their pay. You told me yesterday, sir,—what I was fully prepared to hear,—that in connection with the forthcoming treaty we’re stipulating for the dismissal of de Glehn because of his German antecedents and admittedly German sympathies. The proposed State railway to Quixedo was practically intended to serve the Lindau mines. His going means that it won’t be carried through, or at all events that it won’t be run almost exclusively for Lindau’s benefit, as it was to have been. March knew this was on the cards and foresaw a big dead loss and a tremendous drop in profits. Hence he has been working against us in every possible way over there. I know Lindau intimately, and I’ve been pretty certain for a long time that he was being put up to his job. He isn’t brainy enough to work all those elaborate schemes for himself. Besides,

he isn't half a bad old hat. Political maneuvering on a small scale suits him to a T, but criminal activities give him the fidgets, and when there was that epidemic of shooting accidents last June——”

“Anglicé?” from West.

“Attempted assassinations,” translated Marquerau with a grin. “Not one of them was brought off. It's tremendously difficult to kill a man. Any conscientious anarchist will tell you so. Nine times out of ten you only—sprain his shoulder.”

“Oh, come, come, Mr. Marquerau!” said the Foreign Minister with a hearty laugh.

“Or break his eyeglass,” finished Marquerau unmoved. “Yes, it's an unsatisfactory job, and one that amateurs find trying to the nerves, and Lindau occasionally came to pieces. The night they didn't shoot the President I found him in tears. He said he hadn't bargained for that sort of thing and that he preferred a quiet life if only ‘they’ would let him alone.”

“Who were ‘they’?”

“That's what I came home to find out. I thought at first his Fatherland was behind him, but I soon discovered that German national aims were being subordinated to Lindau's private mining interests. One or two small points gave me the tip that the hand behind was English. He was always getting letters with English postmarks and in English writing which upset him a good deal. They professed to be German——”

“You read them?”

“One or two. I have one here,” he touched his breast pocket. “They were in German and signed Schmidt, but the writing was a poor imitation of German *Schrift*, and there were slips in idiom which no native would make——”

“You speak German well?”

“I graduated at Heidelberg.”

“Other languages?”

"Spanish, Italian, Russian—French, of course: I'm Pen-tecostal enough to get along in Greece and the Balkans."

"I beg your pardon for the interruption. Pray go on."

"Remained to be seen who was packing the cards over here. It had to be big money, which limited the field a bit, because the stakes were high and the game was expensive. But I shouldn't have dropped on the trail so rapidly if March hadn't played into my hands. You remember, Aubrey, that night by Victoria Gardens, what it was that March had been saying to you?"

West remembered very well. "And you remember too, sir," he turned to Yarborough, "for you initialed my reply."

"You were full of it and very angry," pursued Marqueray, "and you let slip some hints which took my ear. You said March was the grandson of old Jo Marchmont of the Rand and one of the richest men in town. It struck me on the spot that if March tried to bribe West,—saving your presence, Aubrey,—he must be exactly the sort of bird-witted rogue I was looking for. Then I thought I'd find out where his money was, and I did a little private ferreting, with the details of which I won't worry you. But here's the upshot."

He drew two letters from his pocket-book and gave them to Yarborough. "The first of these is a code communication to Lindau, instructing him that if the treaty goes through de Glehn will probably be dismissed. I stole it from Lindau five days before I sailed for home. The second is Marchmont's acceptance of an invitation to dine with me last Monday. Not alike at first sight, are they? No, because the code letter is in an imitation of foreign script. But it isn't well done. Observe the Greek e's and d's, and the peculiar twisted m's. One needn't lay the case before an expert to feel pretty sure that both letters were written by the same man."

"And you infer——?"

"That March is Hagener and Lindau. His money, his brains, and Lindau's executive dexterity were at the back of the counter-revolution which was all but brought off in Lima last June."

"And which, by-the-bye," said Yarborough, looking fixedly at Marqueray, "was nipped in the bud owing to some information sent privately to the President by a hand he could never trace."

"Was it?"

"Did you write that letter?"

Marqueray smiled.

"It was supposed at the time in Government circles that it was sent by one of the counter-revolutionary rank and file who quarreled with his own leaders and went behind their backs. Their man in Victoria Street told me that the details were too precise to have been known to an outsider."

"Did they get so far as that? Quite right. I played the part of the English freelance keen on any sort of fighting, who went in with them because they professed to be out for political liberty. As a matter of fact, they were mainly out for loot. After the June epidemic I withdrew. I said to Lindau that it was all too dangerous for me and that I had come out to do some climbing and not to get drawn into local quarrels; also that by what I could see their organization was opposed to English interests, and in any case taking potshots at Ministers in the street was not our notion of political propaganda. But up to June I was in the inner ring. I was a member of the Red committee. Neither Lindau nor any one else identified me with the spy who betrayed them in July. Lindau and I are still excellent friends."

"Upon my word," said Yarborough, "you are not too scrupulous, Mr. Marqueray!"

"If they had identified you," said Val, speaking for the first time, "what would have happened to you?"

"I should not have been *persona grata* in Lima, Miss Yarborough."

"But you weren't in any danger? You gave them no chance of unmasking you?"

"None that I could avoid, I assure you."

"Even if you had made a slip at a committee meeting you would only have had to go to the English consul to protect you?"

"Certainly, I should only have had to go to the Minister."

"If they would have let you get there," Val scored her point quietly. "Mr. Marqueray risked what all spies risk in war."

Marqueray, caught, bowed to her.

"At all events," said Yarborough, picking up Marqueray's draft, "no one in this room is in the least concerned to attack or defend your private ethics, sir. What I want to know is how to bring this odd underhand work home to Marchmont and above all how to draw his fangs in future. Organizing counter-revolutions in Peru is not an offense under English law, nor for that matter is rigging the Peruvian stock-market, as I gather from this draft that Marchmont has been doing. H'm. . . . How on earth do you get all this information? Do you tamper with the fellow's valet?"

"The financial details I got mainly from Cope and Cope, my own brokers. It is no secret that March is involved in Peruvian copper, though no one over here has ever traced the direct connection with Hagener and Lindau. But he holds openly a lot of other shares."

"Now as to the Thursday night meeting."

"There I can give you chapter and verse. In fact, for me that clinched the case. I put on a private agent to shadow March a week ago, and he reported to me on Thursday morning that March was up to mischief. I was out all day"—Marqueray avoided Val's eye—"and never read

that letter. He waited till six o'clock to get my instructions, and when none came he acted on his own responsibility. It was he who warned the Yard that there was going to be trouble at Mile End. Unluckily, what between leaving it so late and keeping my name and Marchmont's out of it, his information was not full enough to be much use. But he can swear that March was in communication with a chap named Simpson who got the roughs together. Simpson has done a good deal of March's dirty work. He picked up his men at the Cat and Fiddle in River Inn Yard, stood them free drinks and paid them a sovereign a head; but he took his orders direct from Grosvenor Square. March was at the meeting: wasn't he, Aubrey? I saw him and pointed him out to West. Tell that to the official police, and they won't take long to work up a case. Remember, sir, March has not the remotest notion that he's being shadowed. It should be child's play to make him incriminate himself."

"But what on earth am I to do with him?" Yarborough mused. "He has made an infernal nuisance of himself,"—he touched his own arm ruefully,—"and his Peruvian activities must be put a stop to. Merely to give his name to the President will practically cut his throat: it's easy to tackle your man when you fight by daylight. But what an extraordinary little ruffian it is! One foot in the grave and the other in the House of Lords. I dare say we could jail him if we liked for the connection with de Glehn, but, good heavens! the Lords would not thank me for making them wash their dirty linen. Even as a misdemeanant he would provide notable headlines. What would the Labor papers say? No, what he wants is a sound horsewhipping."

"Happy to oblige," said Marqueray, laughing.

"But unluckily that's not practicable in these emasculated times. What's to be done, Aubrey? How shall we cope with the noble lord?"

"I should like," West said, in his slow, precise voice,

"to dissociate myself entirely from the discussion. Lord Marchmont and I are on such bad terms that I can't take an impartial view. Yes, quite private and personal, sir. I should like to horsewhip him on my own account."

"You would? Lord bless me! Marchmont seems to have made himself excessively unpopular."

Yarborough got up. "I'm due at the P.M.'s. This will take some thinking over. I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Marqueray. Could you manage to look in again on Monday? I shall have verified your draft of the evidence by then and shall be better prepared to discuss the next step.—Shall we say the same time? Thanks very much. Till two o'clock, then. Talk it over with West and see if you can make any suggestions." He got as far as the door, turned, and came back. "By-the-bye, do I understand that you never got any pay for your very valuable services?"

"Never," said Marqueray, standing up.

"It was, of course, in Mr. Vere's day a purely family arrangement. But I think that should be regularized," said Yarborough. "Our Secret Service is not so poor as it used to be, and personally I dislike these semi-amateur jobs. Besides, it would be an insult to call you an amateur. You seem to have handled Lindau, for example, with quite a professional touch. Think it over, Mr. Marqueray."

He went out, and his daughter followed him.

"Gad, that was a slap in the face for me!" said Marqueray.

"It was so intended," said West, drumming with his fingers on the table. He was expert in soothing the sensibilities of men who had borne his chief's blistering tongue, but in Marqueray's case it would have been impossible—he was not sure that he wished—to smooth over such a drastic humiliation.

"Before the girl, too."

"That also was intentional."

"Curse him, does he think——? No, he doesn't." Marqueray began to laugh, and his brow cleared. "He knows as well as you do that it's diamond cut diamond for me, and the pleasure of the game. But what was the hit about Lindau?"

"Presumably he doesn't like the way you've let him down. The other men may have deserved all they got,—though I shouldn't care to join any sort of organization with the intention of betraying it,—but on your own showing Lindau was your friend."

"You speak plainly, Aubrey."

"I can only say that I speak plainly because I feel strongly, and that if—if you weren't my cousin I shouldn't speak at all."

Marqueray sat silent for a minute whistling a tune under his breath.

"As for the other men, I am not going to defend myself; it isn't worth while. But you're on the wrong tack about Lindau. You must remember, Aubrey, that I know the country intimately, and you don't. Peru is rotten with graft, and there are no hard-and-fast lines in Latin-American politics. Lindau has been sitting industriously on the fence any time these ten years, and the Government are pretty well aware of his connection with Ramón and de Glehn. No one is going to lay a finger on him for having been mixed up more or less against his will with the Reds. As a small shareholder he'll lose money over the Quixedo railway, but that is Yarborough's doing, not mine; as manager he'll continue to draw his regular pay, and he'll sleep sound o' nights, which he hasn't done since June. If you knew how frightened he is of March! I wrote him a line last night warning him which way the cat was going to jump, and I promise you he'll shed tears of joy over it, poor old Ernst. Think! if he were in danger, what would

have been simpler than to stipulate for his immunity? I had the game in my own hands. At least give me credit for standing by my friends when it costs me nothing!"

"I beg your pardon: I'm awfully sorry. I of all men, after the way you stood by one of your friends last night, ought to have known you better."

"Tut, tut.—But what have I done after all to bring you all down on me? No worse than any military spy. If they had caught me out in Lima, my life would not have been worth five minutes' purchase. I could only have got away by flying the country, and it is long odds that I should have been stabbed before I reached the steamer gangway. I had even less chance than an ordinary spy because I stood alone. Does secret service work become dishonorable because it happens to be doubly dangerous, and unpaid?"

"I don't know, I never swotted up points of casuistry. But I do know that I wish you'd drop it, Dan."

"*Et tu?*"

West continued to beat a tattoo on the table.

"You're more scrupulous than Vere was.—You're incidentally a good deal more faddy in other ways than I am," Marqueray added, indicating by his change of tone a wish to change the subject. "What did you mean by refusing to discuss Marchmont? That, my good chap, is utter rubbish. The man's a public and private nuisance, and you're as much entitled to remove him as to call in the sanitary cart to remove a dunghill in your neighbor's garden."

"But I don't like mixing up public and private quarrels. One can't be impartial to a man one hates as you and I hate Marchmont." West got up, laying his hand on Marqueray's arm. "Do keep out of it! Let Yarborough settle his own scores. One can't—one simply can't—be too careful in these things. I admit that many men in political life will jump at the chance of settling a private grudge under cover of a public grievance. But do let us,

who are accustomed to think of ourselves as belonging to a disciplined class, the public school class or whatever you like to call it,—do let us be a little more fastidious! How else are we to justify our existence? What does it mean, any of it, if not”—he brushed the tips of his fingers together—“a definite refusal to dirty our hands?”

“I should consider,” said Marqueray lightly, “that I had justified my existence if I had cut the skin off Marchmont’s back.”

“I’m not so sure, and I wish I were. Dan, you can kick me from here to Chelsea if you like, but what were you doing yesterday afternoon?”

“Motoring with Phyllida.”

“You’re going on with that?” West turned away. To judge by his voice he was feeling sick. “I can’t discuss Marchmont with you at all.” Marqueray, who had seen this coming, gave a deep sigh and retreated to the window. Naturally, having gone out of his way to be frank while he was behaving badly, he felt loth to confess to his reform; but he could not leave West under an impression which reflected on Phyllida as well as on himself, and he turned his back on his cousin and said his palinode to Hyde Park.

“Doubtless I had better explain. . . . The situation is unusual, but—Am I trespassing on your working hours? No? Well, it all bears more or less on what Yarborough instructed us to discuss. Since it’s agreed that you stand to Miss Browne *in loco parentis*, will you give me your young daughter’s hand in marriage?”

“In—marriage?”

“I’ve persuaded her to honor me so far. She was rather unwilling at first; seemed to think I might turn out a second Hamon.”

“But you’ve only known her a fortnight!” said West, conscious that his comment was stupidly inadequate, but unable to think beyond it.

"Long enough to know my own mind, I assure you. The fact is, I got her story out of her last night. You said I was mistaken in my judgment of her. *Touchez-là, Aubrey.*" He turned round and held out his hand. "You were right and I was wrong. I now know the truth of her connection with Marchmont." He repeated it in a dozen sentences. "After that, do you wonder that I shouldn't mind flogging him if Yarborough felt that it met the case?"

"I should not care to cane him myself," said West slowly. "Difficult to do it without touching him."

He sat down at his bureau and began to sift and examine the files of correspondence handled in his absence, as if this light mechanical brainwork helped him to think clearly. "I'm not at all surprised. Knowing her and knowing him, I could never understand . . . And so you want to marry her?"

"Yes, we settled it last night. She's to stay on with the Drews for the present: we agreed that she couldn't go off at a moment's notice and leave the place short-handed. I went in and saw Mrs. Drew; a nice, sensible woman: handsome, too, in her way: no nonsense about her. Phyllida is to be paid less and have more free time. I dare say she'll stay till Christmas, which will give me time to turn round. I shouldn't care for a hole-and-corner ceremony; I must hunt up some women to give it countenance—there don't seem to be many going in my family, but I have some Vere aunts, and I thought of writing to your mother. Also I should like to get some repairs done to the old place in Dorsetshire. We may go there for our honeymoon. I always prefer my own household gods, and Phyllida isn't keen on foreign travel. She was tremendously taken with the Dorsetshire plan. She wants to be married with bell, book, and candle, bless her small head; I think she's still half afraid the knot won't be properly tied." He had

begun in his most conventional manner, but it had softened gradually till at the close it was impossible to miss the accent of its soft, caressing fondness. West was thunderstruck. "If I had my own way," finished Marqueray, "I'd marry her out of hand by special license. But I will not—no, I will not act otherwise than I should be obliged to act if I were marrying a girl of an assured position."

"Have you—you haven't—spoken to Mr. Vere yet?"

"No; why?" West went on cutting open an envelope. "You think he'll make a row? No doubt he will; it would suit his book far better if Phyl and I set up an informal flat in Kensington. But when he sees Phyllida——" Meeting West's eye, Marqueray stopped, and his normal brickdust complexion turned slowly to a dark copper color from forehead to throat. He gave a nervous laugh and put his hand before his face. "Yes, now you mention it, I suppose other fellows have said that before. Oh, shut up, Aubrey, I bar chaff!"

"Do you also bar well-meant advice?"

"No, say absolutely anything you like. There's no one else in the wide world that will give me any, for I shan't stand it from Vere."

West drew a deep breath. "You're very much in love, Dan: it's an unexpected manifestation: it's rather out of your line: it's really rather touching. But you're taking a heavy responsibility. Phyllida has no one to protect her, and if she marries you she'll be dependent on you and you alone. Are you sure of yourself?"

"Point the moral."

"Since you went to Heidelberg you've never, I imagine, tried living with a second person for any length of time. Marriage limits one's freedom of choice. You strike me as very much wedded to your independence.—You call me Phyllida's guardian."

"And a very considerate guardian, too." Marqueray

laughed teasingly. "You fill me with alarm! But, I say, is it any longer ago than yesterday morning that you were imploring me to marry her?"

"I hope I've outgrown the virtue of fools," West answered with a fleeting smile. "I spoke without reflection on the spur of the moment, and I'm afraid you were right when you said I showed ignorance of life. Take Mr. Vere. You say you won't stand his lecturing you, but the fact remains that he brought you up, and you owe him a lot and he's very fond of you. Such a marriage will be a frightful disappointment to him. Legitimately so. I—I don't much like it for you myself, Dan."

"Do you too recommend the flat in Kensington?"

West brushed that jibe aside. He had just opened a letter franked by the Chief Government Whip, and he finished reading it before he went on.

"Your own point of view I don't pretend to touch. But there's the other factor in the case: Marchmont. Spotless as your wife will be, she has entered into certain relations with him, and if you and she are to appear in ordinary society, as you seem to contemplate doing, you're bound to run across him. I do not think that Lord Marchmont can be relied on to hold his tongue."

"I can see to that."

"You cannot; least of all by thrashing him. I know Marchmont fairly well. He's a coward, and if you thrash him or threaten him he'll promise anything you like. But as soon as your back is turned he'll revenge himself on you in the obvious way. You won't like it if your wife's name becomes discussed in every club in town. You can't horsewhip all London. Oh, Dan, I see endless trouble ahead! and—forgive me—I don't think you're the discreet, placid-tempered sort of fellow that would ignore it or live it down. Either you'll commit some frightful folly in regard to Marchmont—you know the man's a mere bag of diseased bones: if you did horsewhip him, he'd probably

die under it—or you'll be driven off the field. And the position of the man who can't take his wife to his friends' houses is not enviable. There are always the children to be considered." He drew over a sheet of paper and began to write a few lines in answer to Frederick Hope's note. "You've only known her a fortnight. You're always in extremes. Yesterday it was Don Juan, to-day it's Don Quixote."

"What should I do, then," said Marqueray mockingly, "if I were as wise as Cæsar?"

West waited to slip his reply into an envelope, addressed it, and in lieu of stamp signed his own name, "Aubrey Wynn-West," across a corner. "Go and shoot lions."

"Thank you. Have you quite done?"

"I have, and I suppose I've wasted my breath and offended you into the bargain."

"Not in the least," Marqueray laughed, gently slapping him on the back. "Lord love you, I could have told you what you were going to say before you began. Look here, I want you to talk to Phyl. Take her out to dinner to-night, will you? I won't come, she wants to have a chat with you privately, but I'll join you for coffee afterwards. She needn't be in till ten. Can you manage that? All right, thanks no end. Ta-ta, I won't keep you any longer now; you'll be up to your eyes in work after getting that letter which informed you that Deever has dropped off the hooks at last, and which you nobly didn't allow to distract your attention."

"Dan! How on earth——?"

"Ah bah! don't I know Freddy Hope's fist? I can no more forget a handwriting than I can forget a face."

"And can you also read it upside down?"

"Oh, I wish I had," Marqueray replied regretfully. "But, not to profess omniscience, I will own that I met John Deever this morning in Whitehall, who told me that his brother had been taken suddenly worse last evening."

John isn't half so sorry for his brother as he was for himself when you unmasked your batteries."

"Pure fluke! Hope writes to me five times a week about nothing at all."

"And do you, five times a week, blench and turn pale pink over his communications? Oh, Aubrey——!" West, irritated, threw a book at him. "Rotten shot," said Marqueray tranquilly from the door. "That's because you won't wear proper glasses. H'm . . . *Vacher's Parliamentary Companion* has come out of its little blue cover. I will forbear to shy it back at you, in case I might hit you on the nose."

CHAPTER XVII

So quick bright things come to confusion.

DINING at a London restaurant was a novel experience for Phyllida and one full of excitement. West took her to a private room, which she regretted because she would have liked to admire the toilettes of the other ladies, but after all her own gray delaine would have been sadly unsuitable, and it was pleasant to be able to talk freely to Mr. West.

What she chiefly wanted was to talk to Mr. West about Mr. Marqueray, a subject rather trying to West with his divided sympathies: so long as it was only Dan and Dan's relations he didn't mind, and he seized the chance to put in a gentle word for Robert Vere, though he scarcely hoped that Phyllida had power enough over Marqueray to stave off a quarrel, or wit enough to wield it if she had; but when she asked if she was doing wrong to marry Dan he hedged, and left Phyllida thoughtful. He was surprised that she dropped the point so readily. Indeed, under several aspects Phyllida perplexed him that night: a mere child in some ways, in others he found her strangely shrewd and brave. He forgot that she was only twenty after all and had not done growing yet. The human mind is a mansion of many rooms, and Phyllida, after a year of arrested development, was opening door after door.

To escape the danger zone, he led on Phyllida to speak of her connection with Marchmont: he could not understand why her betrayed innocence had been content to wear the stigma of guilt. Gradually he realized that Phyllida saw no such distinction. He had forgotten or never known

that clandestine marriages are forbidden by the Roman obedience. Miss Browne, a devout Catholic, had defied this law, and her sin against the Church seemed to her almost as black as any sin against society. Her mind worked lucidly, though on unfamiliar lines. . . . Lucidly, good heavens! There came a point at which West sat back in his chair and ceased to take any interest in the menu. Though she regarded it as a mere Protestant heresy, Phyllida was naturally delighted to find that West and Marqueray now held her spotless, and while she explained how Marchmont had misled her, West listened with a deadly and ever-growing apprehension. How *could* she have known she wasn't really married? . . . West took out his handkerchief and wiped from his forehead the damp of utter dismay. Was it imaginable——? If it were so, how Marqueray would curse him!

"I want you," she said, "I do want *you* to understand. I owe you—oh! more than any one in the world but Dan. Faith, I owe you Dan!" She folded her hands on his arm. West could hardly sit still in his chair. "I'm not sure now but what I ought to say no to Dan—if it weren't so difficult, saying no to Dan when ye—when ye love him." She raised her beautiful speaking eyes as though she wished West to read her very soul. "But I wouldn't have you think I was quite wicked. I never dreamed I wasn't Hamon's wife. Otherwise I'd never, oh, never marry Dan—Oh!"

Marqueray had come into the room in time to hear these last words, which were spoken when West and Phyllida were left alone with their coffee cups. He was not in evening dress, and his serge clothes immediately riveted Phyllida's eye. "Dan, d'ye always wear blue serge?" was her welcome to him.

"Evening, Aubrey. Do I always wear blue serge? I haven't the faintest idea," Marqueray replied, drawing up

a chair to the table and sitting down. "You had better be civil to me, for I'm worth a lot of money. I sat down to poker with Lawrence Sturt at the club, and I lifted four hundred off him by dinner time. I held nothing but straight flushes. Lawrence said either I had a pack up my sleeve, or my best girl was going to jilt me."

"But you are a shocking gambler, Dan!" said Miss Browne, round-eyed.

"Ruthless," agreed Marqueray. "Lawrence is gone to blow his brains out. Cheer up, when I'm married I shall never play anything but auction at half-a-crown a hundred. Well, you two, have you had a nice dinner? What did they give you to eat? What have you been talking about besides the prospect of our getting married, which appears to be remote, from what I heard?" He captured Phyllida's hand and pressed it openly, laughing across at West. "No, now, let me go, that's no way to behave," said Phyllida, aggrieved. Marqueray released her instantly.

"Will you give me a cup of coffee?" he asked, leaning his elbows on the table. "I like this place; they give you real Mocha. What pretty flowers, too, aren't they?" He stretched out his arm to pull a spray of jasmine from the nearest bowl.

"Oh, but that's a pity," said Phyllida. "Ye'll disarrange the vase." Marqueray relinquished the spray. "Ye are so—so energetic," complained Phyllida. "Ye're never still."

"It is true, I am a restless fellow. May I have a cigar, Phyl?" He offered his case to West, who shook his head, smiling. "Got a head on you, Aubrey?" Marqueray inquired, looking at him attentively. "You're the color of an old rag."

"He went white like that in the middle of pudding," said Phyllida. "It was Nesselrode pudding. Ye're tired, Mr. West, aren't you? Ye've been doing too much." West

pulled himself together, but with a perceptible effort, and his denial fell flat. "I'll go home early. What time is it now, Dan?"

"Nineish. Don't turn us out yet, I've only just come. Have another cup of coffee, Aubrey. What's the matter with you, eh? Has your affable chief been working you too hard? Try a gin and ginger; it's a certain specific for a head. This fellow's delicate, Phyl, did you know it? Altogether too delicate for a rising young politician. I see Deever's death is in the evening papers. Deever, darling, is the late member for South Cambs, and the prospective member sits before you. But he looks as if he would be better in bed."

"I'm all right," said West, really touched for once and not annoyed by the solicitude which sat so oddly on Marqueray's dark, good-humored face. "Some news I heard to-night is worrying me, but there may be nothing in it. We'll talk about it afterwards. No, no gin and ginger, I thank you; I should have a head if I did. Phyllida has been telling me about your Surrey cottage. It sounds like a woodcut in a German fairy tale."

"Pretty spot," agreed Marqueray. "But I shall sell it now and go and live in Dorsetshire. That is a sweet old place if you like, and topping country for hounds. I shall become a Tory Foxhunter." He threw back his shoulders. "O my Lord, what a life! But I can stand it for a year or two till you're a grown girl, Phyllida; after that we'll up stakes and move out. I wonder would you come where I should like to go——? I must see about getting it to rights. What do you say—shall we slip down in the car and have a look at it? My Raymond-Ray would run us there and back in a few hours." A shade of hesitation appeared in Phyllida's candid eyes. "Rather a long way, perhaps," Marqueray read her thoughts. "I suppose you couldn't get off to chaperon us, Aubrey? Or, better still, would Miss Yarborough care to come and make up a

square party? Milady would like that—wouldn't you?"

"Oh, wouldn't I!" Phyllida cried. "I'd love to see your old home. Are there portraits of you when ye were a little boy?—But, me dear"—her fingertips touched the lapel of his coat: Marqueray gave a perceptible start—"before we do that, I want you to tell Mr. Vere. That's your Uncle Robert that we met in Piccadilly?—like you, but handsome and proud, and middle-aged. Mr. West says he brought you up and that he's very fond of you."

"I'll write to him in a day or two," said Marqueray—a trifle sullen under secondhand admonition.

"No, not write, and not in a day or two. Letters make mischief, and delay is unkind. Ye go to see him to-morrow and be very gentle with him, and if he says things to vex you about me, ye take it patiently for my sake. Ye will do that for me, won't you? Promise."

He looked down at the small weak hand which touched his heart. "Be it so, I promise."

West was perfectly astonished. That Marqueray was very much in love he had already recognized, but he had not been prepared for the gentleness and courtesy and consideration which marked his manner to Phyllida, and which seemed to West, whose own love was the slow growth of years and still embryonic, to be foreign to a temperament so ardent and reckless. But were they, after all, foreign to the aspect which Marqueray showed to his friends? More than once before and again that evening West had been touched to find Dan looking after him in the same way. Marqueray was accessible to pity. He had an inexhaustible fund of sentimental tenderness for anything beloved and weaker than himself. It was cruel and terrible to West, knowing what he feared he knew, to watch those two together, Phyllida putting on small, gentle airs of sovereignty, Marqueray bending his strong will to please her at whatever cost to himself. No doubt he would have preferred to go down alone with Phyllida into Dorset-

shire, but his own disappointment cast no shadow in the steady sunshine of kindness which shone over his little mistress.

When they all rose to leave, in plenty of time (Marqueray saw to that) for Phyllida to get back to Harlesden before ten, West went out of the room to settle the bill, and on his return, the door standing half open, he accidentally saw Marqueray stooping down to kiss Phyllida good night. He touched only her cheek, a mere moth's kiss, but Phyllida in a little gush of tenderness threw her arm over his neck and murmured "*Properly . . .*" That spontaneous caress, daintily given, gratefully taken, was enough in itself to define the relation between them. It brought a flush to West's own face. And this was the bold, unscrupulous spy who had hoodwinked Lindau and outwitted de Glehn! . . . truly there are many minds in one man.

"Aubrey, my dear fellow, you're looking frightfully pale," said Marqueray, as the vicarage door closed upon Phyllida. "I was going to suggest adjourning to the club, but upon my word I think you had better get home and get to bed."

"Come home with me. I want to talk to you."

"And I want to talk to you." Marqueray settled himself in the other corner of the cab. "You'll have to go up to Cambridgeshire now Deever's dead and work like blazes. Your time is short. Luckily you have a lot of ready-made family influence." He began to laugh. "The only time I ever helped a fellow canvass was in the middle of winter in the fen country, and all the floods were out. We performed miracles of heroism, fishing wet electors out of upper windows, and Hely's sister, a charming-looking little girl, ran a soup and blanket canteen. Great sport it was, and the other fellow was as sick as he could be; his own house was half under water, and he could only get out in a boat. We beat him hands down. But the life-saving stunt can only be worked under exceptional condi-

tions. Another plan is to hire some one to get himself run over by an opposition car, but I can't recommend it myself; it's rather an expensive dodge, because if he gets too much killed you have to support him for life."

West said that he was one of those humdrum fellows to whom exciting incidents never happen, and what tip would Marqueray take to keep out of the way? "But I wish Mr. Vere would come up," he added more seriously. "I would in many ways rather fight the election from his house than my own." Marqueray, whose precocity at fifteen furnished him with vivid recollections of the Wynn-West circle, registered a mental note to drag his uncle to Herold; his own determination to help West was unshaken, though he saw that West really had no faith in him and did not want his help.

They drew up in Vivian Street and West let his cousin in. The house was dark and quiet, Eliza and her husband having gone to bed, though it was barely ten o'clock. West, treading softly, led the way into his study and lit a lamp. The hearth was aglow, and on a table in the window Mrs. Fielden had left a temperate tray. "Milk—oh!" said Marqueray, pouring out a glass—not for himself. "Put yourself on the sofa, Aubrey."

"I never had any one fuss after me as you do," said West, half vexed, half laughing. Marqueray lounged across, seized him by the shoulders, and without more ado extended him at full length in an easy attitude—"Dan! don't be an ass," West protested, struggling to get away. Marqueray pinned him down and ran the sofa lightly over to the fire.

"Lie still; if you must stay up when you ought to go to bye-bye, at least you needn't prow! about the room. Don't fidget, or we shall have the redoubtable Eliza coming down, and she'll probably put you to bed with your feet in hot water. Lie down, good dog. Now—stay where I put you, will you?—state your case, or I'm off."

"You haven't the faintest idea what I'm going to say."

"Not the faintest," Marqueray replied, taking West's assertion for a question. "But I shall probably survive it. Is it any more about the prospect of my beating Phyllida after we're married? I don't believe I ever shall. Aubrey— isn't she sweet?" He took up his favorite position on the hearth. "I can't think why you didn't fall in love with her yourself," he confessed rather ingenuously. "But one nail doesn't always drive out another. Why don't you own up? There's no reciprocity about you."

"Did you—forgive me—get her to tell you about her connection with Marchmont?"

"Every last word. I don't mind owning to you now that I have been jealous. But after listening to Phyl's alarming revelations, I'm not jealous any more. In fact, I don't even want to kill March as much as I did. He's a filthy sweep, a stinking blackguard, and a Teutonic swine, and I still propose to cut him in two with a hunting crop, but he may live, for me."

"Did Phyllida explain all the circumstances of their meeting in Ireland?"

"She did, I tell you. Do you want me to repeat them?" said Marqueray, looking rather restless. "In spite of the Christian frame of mind on which I've just been dilating, I don't particularly care to dwell on the topic."

"Did she describe their marriage?"

"The mock-marriage? Yes, and so far as I can see, a less guileless maiden than Phyllida might have fallen into the trap." West uttered a stifled groan. "My dear Aubrey, what on earth is wrong?"

"You never will forgive me. I wish to Heaven I dared hold my tongue. Can't you guess?"

"Haven't the dimmest glimmer. But fire away, I can stand it—unless you touch Phyllida: I bar that: I shan't believe it and won't forgive you if you do."

"Dan, I think she is his wife."

Marqueray turned lividly pale under his bronze. "What makes you say that?"

"Consider: a marriage which one party believes to be legitimate, is legitimate, if there's any possibility of holding it so. The law is framed that way. Oh, Dan, he married her in a church and with all the orthodox ceremonial of a Catholic marriage!"

"There were no witnesses."

West shook his head. "You misunderstood her. She meant that there were none of her own friends present. But she dimly remembers that there were hangers-on who were fetched in to sign the register. In any case, I'm afraid it wouldn't be invalidated by any slip like that."

"Not if they had been married by a priest——"

"They were."

"No, no," said Marqueray, smiling. "Ryan refused to marry them. The priest was of Marchmont's providing, his valet or chauffeur in a skull cap and cassock, and not even sober at the time. Mare's nest, Aubrey."

"Marchmont brought him, and he was drunk, but he was in orders. Phyllida knew the man."

"Rubbish; I don't believe a word of it." In the complete silence that followed, they heard a thin autumn wind sighing through the still leafy trees between West's garden and the river. Marqueray got up and leaned out of the window. "Why should a man like Marchmont marry Phyllida?"

"Only because he couldn't get her in any other way. She was very young, very innocent, but not so ignorant that he could have got her to run off with him without going through a form of marriage. Women learn that in their cradles."

"But why not Ryan, then?"

"Ryan, as you know, was moving heaven and earth to stop the marriage. Phyllida says he quarreled with Marchmont and wrote to the Dublin cousins. No doubt he knew

Marchmont by reputation. Unluckily, instead of speaking openly to Phyllida, he made the common but fatal mistake of trying to act for her over her head, and so drove her into rebellion. She had such a horror of the Dublin cousins."

"But why should Marchmont bring a genuine priest? It would have been simple enough to get some led-captain of his to chuck on a cassock for the occasion."

"Simple you call it? Rogues of that description are not to be picked up at short notice in a decent Irish village. Besides, if he could have put his hand on such a man, he would have laid himself open to lifelong blackmail. It is a felony."

"But Marchmont is notorious. He doesn't marry."

"Not when he can get a woman on any other terms. But he's a man of headlong caprices, and if they were balked I'm convinced he'd pay any price. Phyllida is very pretty, more than pretty. Poor child! she has that unhappy fatality of attraction which men lose their heads over—Look at your own case."

"He never would have dared to desert her at Innsbrück if she had been his legal wife."

"I suspect he wouldn't have deserted her with such abominable brutality if she hadn't been his wife."

"It was a mere fluke she didn't die of the shock."

"He meant her to die."

Marquerey turned round and stood looking down into the fire. "I haven't begun to believe a word of it yet. Good God, it isn't possible! This is all guesswork: you've no proof of it—nothing to go on."

"His own words."

"Acknowledging her——? I don't follow."

"When he cast her off. Oh, Dan, you misunderstood her because you were on the wrong tack altogether! He never told her it was a mock marriage: he never told her the priest was a mock priest: what he said was that the

marriage was void because he was a Protestant and she a Catholic."

"She could not have believed that!"

"It was the one thing she would believe. He couldn't have made her believe that the priest who married them was no priest, because she knew he was. His name was Horsfall, and he was the curate of Inniscorthy, which is a tiny hamlet of about fifty souls eight or nine miles from Ballyhanna; a very bad specimen of his class, or he would never have performed such a ceremony; a half-educated man and very poor, but still in orders, though he had had trouble with his Bishop more than once, and had been threatened with suspension. Marchmont went to this black sheep because no decent priest would have done what he wanted. Probably he called himself a Catholic to save trouble. I dare say if the truth were known he had even then some half-formed notion of deserting her when he got tired of her, and thought that if the priest were involved in irregular proceedings it would shut his mouth. But that the marriage was performed with the usual rites Phyllida is positive. What Marchmont said and she believed was that it was void because he never applied for a dispensation. She knew nothing of the civil marriage law. She took his word without question. She doesn't question it now."

"She never shall."

"She will," said West, "for I shall tell her—no: you'll tell her yourself."

"No, she's mine, and mine she shall stay."

West misunderstood him. "As surely as you do that, Marchmont if he hears of it will claim her. He's built that way. He wants whatever he can't get or other men have taken from him."

"Let him claim her," said Marqueray laughing. "He'll have to reckon with me, not with her."

"Rubbish," said West; "you daren't touch him. He's

safe from you now if he never was before. Think, and you'll see that the last man on earth who can lay a finger on Phyllida's husband is yourself."

"She shall get a divorce from him. She could get an absolute divorce. Desertion, cruelty, and if you want the other ground I can give it you. I know a bit about March's private life."

"You forget," said Aubrey sadly, "that the child is a devout little Catholic."

"What of that?"

"No divorce for Catholics, Dan."

"But," said Marqueray patiently—his features were fine-drawn and his shoulders bent, but the cool determination of his manner frightened West—"there's no need for March ever to know. I can marry her quietly and take her away out of England. I'm not so struck on English life that exile would be an intolerable blow: you heard what I said just now about living abroad later on. We need never set foot over here again till March is dead and gone to his own place, the location of which is not in much doubt."

"But you can't do it, good heavens! you can't marry a woman that's married already!"

"Provided no one knows and she believes herself to be my wife, what does it signify? Even your Christian God would hardly, I suppose, visit that involuntary crime on her small head in the next world."

"Think," said West, aghast. "You could not do that."

"Why not?"

"If it ever came out, your name would be covered with disgrace. My dear Dan, you would be sent to prison!"

"The risk is incidental to my trade."

"Nonsense! This—this is different."

"You mean that it would be a breach of social laws." Marqueray turned on him, a rebel formidably sincere. "You thoroughgoing Westerner! I don't care *that* for

social laws that are expedient and not equitable. I've been up against society a dozen times in my life, and its regulations vary too much to be impressive. Find another argument."

Sophistry? No, not sophistry: between him and his cousin lay one of those temperamental, often racial divisions which analysis will rather deepen than bridge. Foiled here, West fell back on what he supposed to be common ground. "You couldn't play a part all your days."

"I'm uncommonly good at playing a part," said Marqueray grinning. "That wouldn't worry me."

"Yes, with your enemies or with outsiders, but not with your friends. You did it for a little while with me, but you hated doing it, and before long you couldn't stand it any more. You were frank with me—embarrassingly frank, if you don't mind my saying so. You must face your virtuous disabilities, old man. If you broke down in deceiving me, do you think you could keep it up with the woman you care for?"

"It suited my book to be frank with you. If I'd chosen, I could have worn a mask till Doomsday, and so I could with Phyllida."

"It would be a cruel, cowardly trick as bad as Marchmont's."

"Oh? 'I am not valiant neither, But every puny whipster gets my sword——' Aubrey, I am a meek man, but I will not stand being evened to March. I object to having my name mentioned in the same breath with his."

"Yet yesterday you were using every advantage you could to get her to give way to you," said West, "and to-night, to satisfy your passion, you're prepared to entrap her by a downright lie. In your own mind you can put any gloss on it you like, but the plain truth is that she would be your mistress, and her children, if you had any, illegitimate. You daren't do it. And what's more, you shan't. If you won't speak to Phyllida, I shall myself."

"Don't hit so hard, and, let me add, blindly," said Marqueray with his strange gentleness of manner. "You get hot so quickly! See now, Aubrey, you may as well do me justice. I am not, as you vigorously put it, satisfying my own passion: I am not, if you would only believe it, thinking much about myself yet: I'm thinking of that child, for whom, if I don't marry her, I can do nothing. You know what she is: if I were her husband she'd take everything from me, but so long as I'm only her lover she won't take twopence. She won't even let me get her a fur coat to wear, though she has no wrap for cold weather. She contemplates, or did contemplate, saving up her wages till she can pay you and me back for her bits of clothes, the fur cap and the precious gray dress she had on to-night and the shoes and stockings and all the rest of it. If I don't marry her—*Vaya*, we won't wrangle over terms: say bring her to live with me as my mistress if you like, my mistress she is and will remain when she's my wife—but if I don't in her eyes legitimize the tie she won't let me do a thing for her. She'll stick to Harlesden. Rather a dreary life. Drearier than if I'd never crossed her path, because she knows now what it's like to be cherished and taken care of. You saw us together to-night. Didn't you——" Without warning his voice failed.

"Dan," said West, getting up and laying a hand on his arm. "Dan, I'd give ten years of my life——!"

"Did you not," Marqueray finished evenly, "recognize that she cares for your humble servant?"

"I know you're in love with each other."

"Yet you expect me to give her up?"

"I expect you to do what's best for her."

"I've been laboriously trying to explain to you——"

"I'm afraid it was very special pleading. What you forget is that there's no prospect of Harlesden for her any more. If she is Marchmont's wife, he must be made to

acknowledge her. Some one must go over to Ireland and investigate."

"Good God! you aren't suggesting that she should live with him again?"

"Heavens, no! On the contrary, if it can be done and the Catholic authorities allow it, she ought to get a total separation. Nothing could justify our letting her return to him. Orthodox or not, I'd rather she went with you than that. When she married him, she was such a child that he couldn't hurt her much, but she's older now, and she would die under it. Go from you to Marchmont? Good heavens no!"

"Oh! I'm afraid you're not a good Catholic," said Marqueray with his profound and disconcerting irony. "I think you'll find that Ryan will uphold the sanctity of the marriage bed. But what is your idea, then,—merely to make March make her an allowance?"

"The allowance must follow, but that isn't the main point. Think over it for yourself. What was and is the child's eternal cry? That she's a 'fallen woman.' She never was one in any intelligible sense, I grant, but she must be acquitted even of the technical stain. There's the dead child to be legitimized."

"Oh! yes, her child and his," said Marqueray thickly.

West was silent, feeling that he had said enough, suspecting that Dan could not bear much more. Marqueray was sitting down in a chair near the open window, his cheek resting on his hand, the firelight reflected in his brilliant, dazed eyes. The cessation of West's voice seemed to be a physical relief to him. He got up after five minutes and lounged over to the tray and poured out a quantity of brandy sufficient to have made West drunk, and tossed it off like water.

"I don't mind owning that you've administered the worst facer I've ever had in my life," he said a moment

later, sauntering back to the fire, and apparently rather cooler than before: not that he had ever, except when his voice broke, let his hand slip from the curb. "It certainly is an ugly dilemma, and your last point has more weight with me than anything that went before. I agree that it's hardly fair to let Phyllida mourn all her life for her declension from the paths of virtue. But I could console her." West thought not, but he held his tongue. "What I fear is that the Church will hand her back to March. 'Whom God,' etc. That is the sort of deadly devilry that Christians, Catholics above all, love to perform in the name of Christ. Weighing one risk against another, I'd rather keep her in my own hands. I'm not a Christian, and I don't subscribe to the social code. I'm not a rebel *ad hoc*: I'm an individualist by birth and conviction. Marriage, what is it? A fence. Provided Phyllida believed herself safe inside the whitewash, it wouldn't signify a straw to me whether we were legally bound or not, and I certainly shouldn't stick at telling her a lie or two——"

"Any more than at telling me a lie or two now."

"Excuse me?"

"You are lying to me, Dan."

"I am not, I——"

"You are," West affirmed with a scornful certainty. "I'm sorry I badgered you with argument, for it was time thrown away. You're incapable of playing such a sorry part as that. It's you that will tell Phyllida, not I. Come! I'm so certain of it that I'd give you my word, if you liked, never to tell her."

Marqueray's face gleamed. "You had better not do that, Aubrey."

"No, it would hardly be fair. It would throw the whole strain on you, and you've enough to bear already."

Marqueray stood looking down at him and holding him with his eyes. "Do you think I'm so much afraid of the policeman in the social street?"

"I think that you have a profound and passionate and inborn reverence for purity."

"Oh.—Good night," said Marqueray abruptly.

He turned for a moment at the door. "I say, don't you let our affairs worry you. Get to bed and to sleep; you've a tearing fortnight's work before you."

CHAPTER XVIII

Tut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my birth.

BOTH West and Marqueray spent the greater part of the next few days in travel, West alternately running up to Cambridge and returning to nurse his chief through a full dress debate, while Marqueray went over to Ireland and there rapidly satisfied himself—to use a paradoxical term—that the woman he loved was as fast bound to Marchmont as if they had been married in Farm Street. On his return he had an interview with Phyllida in Harlesden, when, as he laconically explained, “we agreed to give each other up.” He appeared in Chelsea, collected and defensive, to tell West this much and no more, and to talk over the situation on purely impersonal lines.

Naturally he had been obliged to put off his appointment with the Foreign Minister, and West took advantage of the delay to persuade Yarborough to let the political case against Marchmont stand over for a little while. West said he would have more leisure to throw himself into it when his election campaign was over. He was in fact working double tides, but his deeper reason was that he had a superstitious dread of bringing Marqueray into contact with Marchmont. And to his surprise Marqueray agreed.—“No hurry for that: one thing at a time: better settle the private quarrel first. One can’t fight a duel with a sword in each hand.”

West could make nothing of his cousin and not much of Phyllida, whose aspect wrung his heart. She made him think of a little spring tree after a frost, the pink and white petals all nipped and the small green buds drooping.

She had been unhappy ever since her father died except for the brief time—some thirty-six hours—of her engagement to Dan, and now the sun had gone in again, and she was never going to be happy any more. All her pretty, dainty 'airs were over. She did not cry before West, though her eyes were red, nor did she rebel against destiny. " 'Tis me own fault," murmured Phyllida; "it could none of it have happened if I hadn't flown in the face of Holy Church by getting married behind me own Father Ryan's darling back!"

West wanted to put the case into the hands of a lawyer, but Phyllida was frightened of legal proceedings, and Marqueray was fastidiously nervous of publicity—an inherited trait: West had seen it in Robert Vere: either uncle or nephew would have made any sacrifice to keep a woman's name out of the papers. Vain to point out that no honest lawyer would betray a client's confidence! One cannot argue with a distaste. Marqueray only answered, "Dirty linen," with Vere's own sensitive lift of the head. In the end, West offered to act for Phyllida. She could not act for herself, and Marqueray had no title to intervene. No more had West, for that matter, but he felt twenty years older than Dan, and most people took him at his own valuation.

When in England Marchmont divided his time between a Georgian pile in Grosvenor Square and a country house which he had built for himself on the Hog's Back between Guildford and Farnham: and he carried with him wherever he went a personal suite which included a private detective, bored and businesslike, and a physician of some standing who often asked himself how long he could stick to his job. It was characteristic of Marchmont that he always had honest men about him. He kept some tools, like Simpson, for dirty work, but most of his staff, though not fond of him, were to be trusted. Statham, late of Har-

ley Street, had broken down in health and was in debt when Marchmont offered him next to nothing to do and £600 a year resident salary for doing it, with ample facilities for research. Gavin Macbain, after working his way up from street constable to detective inspector in the C.I.D., was entrusted with the protection of a foreign Royalty on a visit to York House. A wandering lunatic armed with a peashooter slipped through police nets which would have caught a sane criminal, Royalty was badly frightened and made to look ridiculous, and Macbain was transferred to divisional work with a black mark to his name. Marchmont could have got him cheap, but instead of doing so offered him an increase on his previous rate of pay.

Marchmont was one of those men who float on the surface of London life by virtue of their wealth and the rather cynical tolerance of their age and social set. "Marchmont? Oh, he's mad," was the common reply when finicking gentlemen asked how he kept his footing in exclusive clubs: and amiable men like Aubrey West added, "He hasn't long to live." But they were mistaken, for Marchmont was not mad, and his constitution was so tough that Statham said he was good for another forty years.

It was more true that he had never had a chance. He was the son of a Zionist Jew and a beautiful Gentile lady who spent her life in and out of the divorce court. Hamon, the child of her first marriage, was born less than two months before she ran away with a big, handsome, polo-playing dragoon. In the eyes of the world Hamon was an only child: in the eyes of the underworld he had several half-brothers and sisters of varying paternity, and he was generous to all of them, but especially so to the sister next in age to himself, and for whom the polo-player was responsible.

Hamon's father, a narrow bigot, hated his wife and visited her sins on the son born in wedlock. What that term may cover was drilled into young Hamon from babyhood:

he could not remember the time when he had not known that his putative father believed him to be illegitimate. The iron rule of strict Judaism ground the boy down into raging submission. But after Mathew Marchmont died, Hamon never entered a synagogue or ate kosher meat again.

He was then twenty-two and master of the immense fortune which Mathew and old Joseph, the Rand millionaire, had amassed between them. In faith he was that deadly type, a frightened skeptic. He had good abilities but no need to use them: strong animal passions and no need to curb them: a naturally kind heart with no scope for its affections. So far as the young man's experience went, life was a gamble in which fate had packed the cards against him. None of the restraining motives which in many lives supply the want of a moral code had any effect on Hamon. He had no ties of personal responsibility, no respect for his parents, no sense of duty to his name—how should he have when he had been told all his life that it was not his name? He had not even a nationality, for he was not born a Jew and yet could not call himself an Englishman. To behave well would have cost him a tremendous struggle with his inherited impulses, and for no reward, whereas if he ran loose all the pleasures of the world lay before him, the good, the harmless, and the vicious. Hamon understood himself and his situation with extraordinary clearheadedness. He stripped his mind naked of scruple and went out to see what license could do for a man who had never got any satisfaction out of virtue.

It says something for the original material that at forty-five he was not worse than he was. He had given up getting drunk because his constitution wouldn't stand it, and he was no longer idle because idleness bored him. His good instincts—which he obeyed as readily as his bad ones—made him kind to his family, fair to his dependents, and generous to all Jewish organizations, charitable and reli-

gious. He was a patron of art, of music, of literature—strange tastes, by the way, if he really was the polo-player's son. He was still nakedly unscrupulous and did openly what other men do furtively, but he kept his footing because the men of his set—a set not famous for clear thought about themselves—were mystified by Marchmont's candid, cold, and cruel logic, and thought his bark must be worse than his bite.

"A gentleman to see you, my lord."

Marchmont was breakfasting by himself when West was announced, and his eye lit up when it fell on West's card. "Now what does he want, hang him?" he said to himself. "Is he going to climb down? He's safe to be short of money." Contested elections cannot be fought cheap. "If he leaks usefully he can have it, but I'll make him pay for his impudence the other day. I'll take devilish good care to let Yarborough know who leaked." Then as West came in, "How d'ye do, Aubrey? Delighted to see you. Simpson will bring fresh coffee directly. And what's it like outside?" The question was not merely formal, for the curtains were still drawn and the room lamp-lit, and Marchmont had so far succeeded in eliminating winter influences that for all he knew the month might have been July.

"Foggy," said West, dropping his hat and stick, of which he had declined to let Simpson relieve him, on a side table. "I say, you keep your rooms warm, don't you? Central heating, I suppose. I'll take my overcoat off if I may. No, no coffee, thanks, I breakfasted some time ago." There was a tinge of compassion in his thoughtful, steady eyes: Marchmont was but a sickly specimen of manhood after all, and born under a heavy handicap.

"And how are you getting on in Cambridgeshire?" pursued Marchmont, leading up to what he supposed to be West's cue. "Doing wonders, I hear; Day hasn't a chance. But it's a tiring business and cuts into a lot of money, as

you'll find out, my dear Aubrey, when the bills begin to come in." West fidgeted; he would dearly have liked to tell Marchmont not to call him by his Christian name. "Well worth while, however, even as a mere investment, which is the way I should look on it if I were you. Brains like yours are what I call a sound commercial speculation."

"You flatter me," West replied gravely. He had never shared Marqueray's eagerness to horsewhip Marchmont, but he could sympathize with it to some extent. "But shall we get to business?" he continued, nipping further panegyric in the bud. "Because I'm so run up that I haven't any time for casual morning calls, and the fact is I came here on business of a very difficult and delicate kind." Marchmont's shallow eye gleamed: it was coming, then: he was going to get the information he wanted and to get West into his power. "I apologize beforehand for what I'm going to say, but you see, Lord Marchmont"—the use of the prefix marked West's view of their relations—"you've let yourself drift into an untenable position. I'm here to represent your wife."

"My wife, eh?" said Marchmont, helping himself to grapes. "Which one?"

The blow was absolutely unforeseen, but he prided himself on never being taken by surprise.

"I wasn't aware you had two."

"I dare say several ladies would like to claim the—er—title in both senses of the word. But which of them has engaged your services, my dear Aubrey, you really mustn't expect me to divine."

"You're wasting time," said West with a touch of impatience. "I can prove you married her, and I'm sure you weren't incautious enough to marry any one else. I'm speaking of the child who, when you met her, was Phyllida Browne."

"Oh, ah!" Marchmont nodded. It had not taken him

thirty seconds to recall the night on Chelsea Bridge and to guess roughly what had happened, and he was too cunning to waste his energy in defending a position which West had truly described as untenable. Nor had he, after all, any particular reason for defending it. An entire absence of shame made it easier for him to be frank. "I don't deny anything, and I don't admit anything. Just let me know where I stand, that's all."

"I know where and when you married her, and I can lay my finger on the priest who officiated. He has been interviewed, and he remembers all about it——"

"Who interviewed him?"

The question, slipped out with apparent carelessness, did not catch West off his guard. "I sent over a competent investigator. Father Horsfall isn't a worthy specimen of his class, and you succeeded in getting him to celebrate the marriage in an irregular way, but you couldn't do anything to induce him to invalidate it, nor will you now be able to make him hold his tongue. He's rather an old sinner, and so long as he could tell himself that everything was substantially all right, he was willing, for a consideration, to overlook discrepancies. But he never would have done it if he had known you were a heretic, and he's horrified at the results. He was left in communication with his Bishop and Father Ryan. He couldn't draw back now even if he would."

Marchmont had finished his grapes. He swung his chair away from the table and leaned back in it, stroking his chin with his hand. What an ass he had been to let West startle him! There was nothing in it after all.

"I don't deny or admit anything. But as we're without witnesses, my dear Aubrey, and nothing we say is of the slightest legal consequence, I don't mind assuming for the sake of argument that you have the facts correctly. Suppose I did marry Phyllida—You're in personal touch with her?" West nodded; he was prepared to admit as much

as that. "Say she's my wife, and a devilish pretty one, too. She married me when she didn't know what matrimony meant. I taught her. I enjoyed the process. I never knew any one so verdurously innocent. The situation was piquant, and I doubt if Phyllida extracted as much amusement out of it as I did. But it was legitimate, and the whole Bench of Bishops couldn't have lifted a finger to interfere. Oh, drop it, Aubrey! You can't touch me because I haven't done anything criminal. Say she's my wife: what of that?"

"Subsequently you told her she was not your wife."

"Well, she need not have been, if I had chosen to take advantage of her."

"That is a mistake," West replied politely. "But I dare say you believe it."

Marchmont sighed. He was trying to make West lose his temper, but for a knight-errant West was irritatingly lymphatic and prosaic. He ought to have been on his feet by now in impassioned defense of Phyllida's honor, and giving away at every second sentence the details of their intercourse which Marchmont was fencing to procure. But he continued in the same soft and detached voice without a trace of personal feeling, "And you deserted her at Innsbrück."

"Exactly: because she was becoming a nuisance. I always get rid of any one who becomes a nuisance. If you become a nuisance, Aubrey, I shall get rid of you. So don't do it, if you're wise: because I can make myself infinitely more unpleasant to you than you can to me."

"Can you?"

"If I were to plead justification."

"Justification?"

"I can say that I sent her adrift because she made a confession to me."

West, very conventional and cool in his morning suit, sat still in his chair, one leg drawn up and crossed over,

the other knee. There was no sign of indignation or even irritation in his mild and clear gray eyes; and in fact he was so thankful to be there instead of Marqueray that he had no leisure to lose his temper. He was even able to admire Marchmont's neat swordplay. How deftly he had extricated himself from one tight corner and maneuvered the enemy into another! . . . "If you were to bring any definite charge against Lady Marchmont, you would have to give us the name of the man who wronged you. But perhaps we needn't go into that." He joined the tips of his fingers together and watched Marchmont over them. "An amicable settlement is what we all want. Things can't, of course, go on as they are."

"Does she want me to take her back?"

"Not in the least." West was delicately slow and precise. "Perhaps I ought to have begun by saying that in no circumstances will Lady Marchmont ever return to you. You need have no fear of that. Indeed, her demands are so moderate that you'll probably be willing to meet her on them without much discussion." West's tone was rather regretful: he would have liked to bleed Marchmont, but Phyllida was modest, and Marqueray surprised him again by sharing her unpractical indifference to money. In the end West had unwillingly agreed that the less they claimed for her the better, since it was not to her interest to drive Marchmont into a corner. "All she wants is that you'll publicly acknowledge her as your wife and her child as your child, and give her a small allowance, enough to live on in decency—say seven or eight hundred a year. At your death there should be proper provision made for her. There don't seem to have been any marriage settlements. But during your lifetime she'll be satisfied with the terms I've named—moderate enough in comparison with what any Court would award her."

"By-the-bye, what became of the child?"

"It was born and died in a London workhouse infirmary."

"How long did it live?"

"Three days."

"A boy or a girl?"

"A boy."

"Good job it didn't live." West gave a perceptible start. "Oh, that shocks you?" Marchmont watched him with a fleeting smile. "In my opinion, the procreation of children ought to be made an indictable offense. We're none of us consulted before we're brought into the world, more's the pity, but death at three days old is the devil of an easy way out. Go and look through the window for two minutes, will you, or I shall shock you again." He had taken from his pocket a small silver case and was performing some operation the nature of which West would not have understood if he had not recalled Marqueray's words on Chelsea Bridge. "You've so many prejudices."

"Is that your way out?" West asked, neither shocked nor disgusted, indeed faintly pitying.

"One of them. It is a cursed world." He pulled down his cuff again and lit a cigarette with unsteady hands, the color coming up into his cheeks and the pupils of his eyes contracting as the morphia took hold of him. "Well, now, about this proposal of Phyllida's. To be acknowledged as my wife and to receive a small yearly allowance till my death and suitable provision in my will. There's nothing exorbitant in that, but I should like to hear a little more about the circumstances first. My wife is an attractive woman, and you, if you'll forgive my saying so, are neither her father nor her brother, and you're rather young . . . I suppose you might be about thirty, half as young again as I am. Do you mind telling me how it is that you—in short, that I have the honor of this interview?"

Here again West had his statement cut and dried. It

was inconvenient, but the situation had to be explained, and neither West nor Phyllida would have invented a tale, even if one could have been devised that would both hold water and fit the facts. West's chief preoccupation, however, was to keep Marqueray's name and personality out of sight. He left it to be understood that after saying good night to Marchmont he had gone back alone to the bridge. "I found Lady Marchmont shelter for the night, and afterwards I did what I could to help her."

"Where did you shelter her?"

"In my own house," said West simply. There was nothing else to say: Marchmont had a right to ask, and to deceive him was impossible, for every detail given could soon be sifted. "I turned her over to the care of my house-keeper, a married woman. There was nowhere else I could take her to at that hour."

"And how long did she remain under your hospitable roof?"

"Three days."

"Three—nights?"

West ignored the obvious innuendo. "She came to me on Monday and left on Thursday. A friend of mine, Miss Yarborough, my chief's daughter, who was good enough to interest herself in the unlucky child, found a post for her as nursery governess, and in it Lady Marchmont has stayed ever since. I may add that it was only last Saturday I found out she was your wife. She herself was still under the impression that the marriage was illegal. It wasn't till she let slip something about the priest that the truth dawned on me, and I was able to set investigations on foot."

"Where is my wife now?" said Marchmont after a long pause, during which he sat stroking his chin and staring hard at West.

"She doesn't wish me to tell you, but she'll see you any time you like on condition that I'm present. Not a con-

venient stipulation for me," West added with his faint smile, "but I must try to fit it in somehow if you want to see her; though her demands are so moderate and her case is so strong that I don't know whether there's much to be gained by a meeting. Still, if you insist on it she's prepared to meet you."

"Provided you're there too? Well, now, that really is very funny!" said Marchmont.

He settled down among his cushions and shut his eyes as if he were half asleep, but morphia never fogged his brain, and behind drawn blinds he was rapidly running over West's tale and what he knew of West's character. The latter was not a promising field of research: West was reputed to wear the white flower of a blameless life: he had friends everywhere, even in Marchmont's set, but they were obliged to apologize for him as a mild, eccentric gentleman whose virtue at all events never turned up its nose at other men's cakes and ale. But Marchmont was incapable of believing in any man's virtue. For him there were among men only two varieties—the open and the secret sinner; and West with a political career before him and the prospect of standing for a Liberal constituency, where the Nonconformist conscience makes a candidate's life so much more of a burden to him than it is in a good old-fashioned *milieu* which respects the vices of its betters—West, no doubt, would elect to belong to the latter class, and quite right, too! Marchmont's cynicism was unaffected; nothing would have made him believe that a man of West's age, or of any age, would spare a pretty woman who was in his debt. He was not even resentful. In the bond of a common interest, he was nearer to liking West than he had ever been before, though he did wish now that he had told West to go to the devil at the outset, which was what any man of clear conscience would have done. Of course West had found his account with Phyllida! And she? When a woman is brought to Chelsea Bridge, her innocence, or

what there is of it, is not likely to stand any very tearing strain.

Marchmont raised his lizard eyelids. "When you picked my wife up, was she on the streets?"

West was dumb for a moment. The futility of anger with Marchmont for any speech, for any action, however coarse or brutal, darted into his mind after the first shock of disgust, and his answer when it came was quite gentle and grave. "She was mercifully saved from that fate, Lord Marchmont."

"Saved by you, *par exemple!*" said Marchmont. He leaned forward smiling and took hold of West by the lapel of his coat. "Well, Aubrey, I don't know that I've ever run across anything cooler in its way than your coming here to-day. Oh, don't distress yourself—I never was a dog in the manger, and I shan't claim any property rights in Phyllida, but you might let me have her address all the same: I should like to pay a call on her, and I suppose you keep her somewhere near at hand, don't you? Pity you can't have her with you in Vivian Street! That's the worst of being a public man with a damageable reputation. But I dare say after all you like it better as it is; there's something very snug and cosy about those little unacknowledged flats——"

West reached for his hat and gloves and stood up. "I'm not your wife's lover, Lord Marchmont."

"No, no, wise man," Marchmont laughed, "never make damning admissions! But I don't mind because I don't see how you can possibly touch me now. Haven't you rather cut the ground from under your own feet? Three—days? Oh, Aubrey! I don't think it would go down at all well with a jury. And then to come blustering here and try to get me to make her an allowance—no, my boy, that's pitching it rather too strong! I'm sorry for you because I know you're not very well off, but if you want to set up

housekeeping economically *à deux*, you really musn't come to the lady's lawful husband to finance you——"

He threw up his arm and cowered down in terror.

"You unutterable little cur!" said West. He did not touch Marchmont after all, but the stick that he was holding snapped between his fingers and he threw the pieces on the floor and left the room.

Marchmont had been badly frightened and he resented being frightened. As he straightened himself up in his chair, he really did look rather like a maggot, a vicious maggot of sinister propensities. He would not have been even mildly vexed with West for planning to seduce Phylida on an allowance from her husband. It was such a witty idea that for the joke's sake Marchmont had felt more than half inclined to put his hand in his pocket. Had West been frank and supple he might have got his £800 a year after all! But West intractable, West prudish, West with a stick in his hand—West the hypocrite had struck through all Marchmont's cynical and enervated humors to the one immortal passion of self-love.

He rang his bell. "Ask Mr. Macbain to speak to me."

Macbain was a tall, rawboned North Briton with sandy hair and a calm gray eye. He lived upstairs in rooms furnished in solid mahogany by a Glasgow firm, and had no intention of throwing up a good post because he didn't like his employer. He was an honest man, however, and had made it a condition that his services should not be required in what he called "his lorrdsip's female establishment."

Marchmont was always direct with Macbain. "Sit down, please. Did you notice the gentleman who has just gone out?" Macbain had passed Aubrey on the stairs. "You would know him again?"

Macbain smiled. "I would, my lorrdsip."

"Here's his address," said Marchmont, giving him West's

card. "I want you to shadow him. Find out where he goes and what he does and report to me."

"Verra good, my lorrdr."

"Find out whether he is in communication with a lady calling herself Miss Browne. She may be going under an assumed name. Here's her photograph."

"I would remind your lorrdrship," said Macbain slowly, "of a steepulation——"

"The lady is my wife," said Marchmont.

"That makes a deefference, to be sure," said Macbain.

CHAPTER XIX

I love thee in such sort
As, thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

MARQUERAY did not go near Phyllida in the days that followed. There was nothing he could say to her, nothing he could do, and it was all such anguish to him that for the first time in his life he turned coward. Phyllida would have liked to see him every day. To be with him was enough for her—the sight of him, the occasional clasp of his hand, the comfortable sunshine of his tenderness, which made her feel that no matter what happened Dan wouldn't let any one hurt her. But Marqueray, whose passions were all precise and self-conscious and as vivid as sensations, could not endure her proximity on those terms. He had been very gentle with her, but his self-restraint had cost him too dear to be willingly undergone. He had held her to his heart while he murmured to her that she was Marchmont's wife and could never be anything to him again: and when, dazed and trembling, she slowly withdrew herself from the shelter which was her shelter no more, he had let her go without one effort to detain her. It was true what West said—Marqueray had a profound reverence for purity. Little as marriage meant to him personally, he gave it full value in relation to Phyllida, because for her it was a sacrament, and he would not for anything on earth have persuaded her, or tried to persuade her—he could not have done it—to submit her spotlessness to the stain of his passion:

I love thee in such sort
As, thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

He wrote and told her that the unofficial interview had failed and that West had put her affairs into the hands of his own family solicitor, under directions to go to work as cautiously and quietly as possible; and that they still hoped to avoid legal proceedings, but she must not be surprised to receive a visit from the man of law. Over this communication, which began "My dear Phyllida" and ended "Yours ever sincerely, G.D.M.," Phyllida shed a flood of bitter tears. She couldn't understand why Dan had stopped calling himself Dan, or why he didn't come to see her instead of writing a cruel cold letter which made her feel as if he had gone far, oh, far away from her. Child that she remained in some ways, she was even faintly aggrieved because he was so ready to let her go. Didn't he care——? Marqueray read her mind, but he was not moved by it except to a hard smile. Good, let her think then that he did not love her so much as he had professed to love her! Pride is a useful styptic. If it spared her the heart-break of pity, let her believe whatever helped to make the rough way smooth for those small, beloved feet.

There are, however, limits. He could not at one and the same time fight his own temper all day long and go on meeting Phyllida as though there were no tragedy between them; and he said to West, "Aubrey, take me with you to Cambridgeshire. I'm tophole at canvassing agricultural laborers. Really, I'd like to come."

Before five o'clock on a dim and damp November evening the Bletchley train drew up at Lady's Bridge, and West and Marqueray got out of a first-class carriage—first-class to suit Marqueray, for West generally went third. Marqueray had taken advantage of his seven years' seniority to pay the difference on his cousin's fare. It was getting dark; a fine, windless rain had begun to fall; beyond the clipped shrubs on the deserted platform miles on miles of flat Cambridgeshire countryside stretched away in an

endless monotone of gray and woody brown; the very clouds were brown, or was it amethyst? as if over their dim, unfeatured graduation of pearly gloom a light were reflected up from the brown furrows of plow land or the purple winter bloom of woods.

The porter knew West and touched his cap.—“Any one meeting me, Will?” said West.

“No, sir, only Greenfield come for the luggage.”

“Oh, bother!” West turned apologetically to Marqueray. “We shall have to walk. Do you mind much? I warned you it would be beastly uncomfortable.”

“Do us good to stretch our legs,” said Marqueray cheerfully, concealing his astonishment. All things considered, he thought the future member for South Cambs might have been spared the discomfort of a long, wet walk after a long, hard morning at the Foreign Office. He had not gone near Lady’s Bridge since he was a schoolboy, except to ride over once or twice across the chalk range from Herold; his recollection of the Wynn-West family attitude was vivid, but who could have foreseen that it was unchanged?

Having given instructions to Greenfield, a rustic-looking person who might have been a stable hand or odd job man, West recrossed the line and mounted by a footpath between quickset into the highway—a wide, white Cambridgeshire highway of the legionaries, bordered by dyked ribbons of grass, and these again by bramble hedges. On either side fields, some of pasture patched with osier beds, the March haunt of kingcup and cuckoo flower, some striped by cultivation and giving out a sour tang of moisture and decay: an inn, a few strung-out cottages, a farm backed by wet hayricks: and not a sound to be heard but the diminishing rumor of the train, and the distant creaking of Greenfield’s wheelbarrow, which had come round by the road. Rain hung in the air like mist, chill and soft. West sneezed —“Turn your collar up, Aubrey,” said Marqueray; “you’ll

be wet through at this rate in five minutes, and then you'll catch cold." Indifferent to wind and weather, he was more sorry for West than for himself.

Within a mile from the station, where the highway began to rise to cross a dip in the chalk range, they diverged into one of those sweet old Cambridgeshire villages which nearly always lie off along by-lanes, mislaid as it were in the spacious shadow of oak, ash, and beech. A willow coppice; cottages and farm buildings, thatched roofs and firelit windows; the immense brown nave of a church, looming up under a squat stone brooch-spire; lodge gates set in a weathered wall, their rich ironwork betraying the hand of one of those craftsmen whom William of Orange brought over from his Low Country home; and then ranked beeches and autumnal grass, dead leaves underfoot and a late Stuart building which glimmered with lights under its low roof. West opened the door and stood aside for Marqueray to pass in—"Oh, my dear boy, there you are!" exclaimed a kind, maternal voice.

Marqueray had expected to find the Wests keeping open house, but the grouping of figures in the firelit hall was purely domestic—Mrs. West, a matron in gray, placid and kind, though two small, worried wrinkles were never quite smoothed out of her middle-aged brows: Caroline, a silent, handsome woman of twenty-five: Edward, the lawyer brother, home for the week-end: and one or two younger members of the family, all arms and legs. He was warmly welcomed and given the place of honor by his hostess in the drawing-room—"We'll come into the drawing-room now," said Mrs. West; "you'll want your tea." Marqueray, who after his wet walk would have preferred a cigar and a brandy and soda, felt rather like a cannibal who has dropped in by accident on a missionary meeting. He pulled up his trousers and sat down gingerly on a wicker chair which creaked so piteously that he wondered what Mrs. West would say if he went through the seat of it. But

what Mrs. West did say was, "Do you take sugar in your tea?—But milk?—Did you have a tiring journey? Such a wretched evening, isn't it?—Caroline dear, the hot cakes in the fender.—Daphne dear, your brother would like a plate.—We kept tea for you, we thought you were sure to want some. Aubrey dear, did you make Greenfield understand about the boxes? He is such a stupid fellow; only last week he brought us up a crate full of live fowls by mistake for a hatbox of papa's. . . ."

Finding himself able to reply to Mrs. West out of his sub-conscious mind, Marqueray let the rest of it wander round the room, which to him was strange, precisely because it was so like thousands of other well-meant English rooms. He had had next to no experience of English middle-class home life. Were they simply stupid, these Wests, or what was the matter with them? Why had they furnished Stuart oriel and paneled wall with velvet curtains and a Wilton carpet and six, seven—nine small tables of bric-à-brac? And why hadn't they any chairs fit for a man to sit in? Above all, why on earth were they telling West about the pigs and the poultry and the apple crop, the hunting prospect and the shooting retrospect, instead of inquiring into his own plan of campaign? Caroline had an intelligent head; the lawyer brother lived in Gray's Inn: did they find Aubrey's political work less important than the iniquity of Horrocks of the Brook Farm, who had lately put up a lot of wire? Marqueray had a synthetic mind. It amused him to work all these fresh touches into his old picture of West's early life.

West sat down on the sofa, accepted tea and hot cakes from Caroline, and entered readily into home news—news to him because till now he had been staying at a Cambridge hotel. But as soon as a convenient pause came, he asked if there were any letters for him. "Letters? Oh yes, my dear, quite a sheaf. Fetch your brother's letters, Caroline dear, I put them on the table in papa's study."

Caroline's voice came low and clear. "Father sent them all back to Cambridge, Aubrey."

"All my letters——?"

"Back to the University Arms. He misunderstood about your coming to-night and dropped them into the pillar-box on his way out. I'm very sorry. I went in myself and saw the G.P.O. about it, but there was nothing to be done to-night. That's why I couldn't meet you. You're to have them by the first post to-morrow. It was my fault for not taking them to my own room, but it never crossed my mind that he would be so—that he didn't understand."

Daphne chimed in: "He was cross because he said they made an infernal litter on his table."

West received this news in silence.

"I hope they were not important," said Mrs. West placidly. "Daphne dear, sit down and don't fidget about the room. You mustn't think you can say naughty words because gentlemen do. Oh, and, Aubrey, such a strange-looking person came over to see you this afternoon. He said his name was—now what was it? Wood or Good, and he was quite put out when I said you couldn't see him till to-morrow morning. He asked what time you were coming to-night. I fancy he would have liked to be asked to stay to dinner, but papa wouldn't hear of it. He was not quite a gentleman."

"It was Hood, my agent, I suppose."

"Car and I were both out," said Edward West briefly. "You'll have to make your own arrangements to-morrow, old man."

"Evidently," said West, in a voice which he was unable to divest of fatigue and depression. He gave his cup to Daphne and turned, after a quick, deprecating glance at his mother, to throw himself back on the sofa.—"Oh, my dear!" said Mrs. West, "your muddy boots on my nice clean cushions!"

"They aren't touching the cushions," West explained apologetically. "Do you mind very much? I'm longer than the sofa and my feet are sticking out over the end. Don't make me get up when I'm so comfortable!"

"Tommy, put the newspaper under Aubrey's feet," began Mrs. West—"not that one, dear, that's papa's *Morning Post*, and he hasn't finished with it yet"—here a ringing tread was audible in the hall: "Oh, there is papa coming in!" the worried wrinkles deepening between her gray eyebrows. "Don't you think, dear, you had better sit up? You know how papa hates you to get into these lounging ways——"

And, sure enough, Colonel Wynn-West's first words were, "God bless me, Aubrey, on the sofa again? Fellows can't be trundled into Parliament in a bath-chair!" Then catching sight of Marqueray, "Hallo! Danvers, glad to see you. Come to give this boy of mine a leg up? Very good of you, we shall want all the help we can get. I hope," in no very hopeful voice, "the Committee know what they're about, that's all. They talk as if it were a safe seat, and so it was in poor Deever's time, but he's gone now, more's the pity, and Charles Day is a pretty strong candidate. No sofas for him. He hasn't done as much for the neighborhood as I have, but he's a shrewd, active fellow and a breezy speaker."

What was left unsaid was eloquent enough.

The party broke up soon after, Mrs. West suggesting that Danvers and Aubrey would like to go and unpack. "Will you, dear, take Danvers to his room? Oh, and, Danvers dear, I hope you'll be comfortable, but if Greenfield doesn't get back with the luggage in time for you to dress we shall quite understand; he's rather slow, and I fancy sometimes he waits a little while at the Bushel and Strike, only you won't be late, will you, dear? because dinner is at seven and papa doesn't like to be kept waiting."

Marqueray followed West to his room. It was comfortable, oh yes! and by the special mercy of Providence Greenfield had not tarried at the Bushel and Strike; Marqueray's suitcase, unstrapped, relieved him of the gloomy prospect of sitting down to dinner in tweeds; a pink and white parlormaid, caught in the act of putting a large can of hot water in a large flowered basin, flattened herself respectfully out of the room as they came in, and West threw her a kind, "How are you, Kate?" Then after the door shut on her he folded his arms on the brass rail of Marqueray's large, comfortable double bed and an irresistible smile lit up his face. It was quite a good-humored smile, there was no irritation in it, but Marqueray naturally did not reply to it. Lady's Bridge had its humors, but he could not join West in laughing at them, and he turned his back on his cousin and threw open the old-fashioned shutters which Kate had carefully closed. They had only just been closed and the room was both fresh and warm, and the autumn smell of wet grass and leaves had come into it from the garden. The evening was not dark, for it had left off raining, and a yellow moon glimmered under a bank of cloud. A troop of beeches like great ghosts muffled in dark mantles of leaf marched down to the road, where embers of red and gold and blue shone through All Saints' painted panes; and in the brown tower a bell was ringing, a plaintive, solitary tone.

"Vespers," West murmured:

"'Procul recedant somnia
Et noctium phantasmata . . .'

"But you don't believe in prayer, do you?"

"I? Oh!" said Marqueray with his defensive laugh.

"Never—not even when the phantoms of the night were as thick as those beech-leaves?"

"How then——? Oh, in the war! No, I thought *le bon Dieu* had enough on his hands without being bothered by

Dan Marqueray. Not fair, don't you see? Too much like ringing up the Admiralty to know if Archie's ship was in."

"Is that your idea of prayer?" said West, amused. "No wonder you steer clear of it."

"Define yours, then."

"An exhausting endeavor to reduce one's own will into harmony with the will of God."

This really was a fresh point of view to Marqueray, and one that pleased him because it went some way to rationalize what he had always regarded as a foolish weakness in his cousin, but he was not interested in the subject and he let it drop. "You're looking desperately fagged again."

"It's all so—so inconvenient," said West, his voice flattening to a dead level of depression. "Old-fashioned family life like ours is a difficult relation. My father makes difficulties. . . . You'll see, he won't even like me to use the stables. And Hood's a touchy fellow and is probably offended at the outset. In many ways I'd rather have stayed on at an hotel, but Cambridge isn't central for me, and I don't want folks to say I've quarreled with my people. If you come to that, I haven't: we're very fond of one another. . . . But I do wish I were independent, like Edward. If only I had a little money of my own! I often think what a fool I was to take up a job like mine, which doesn't bring me in enough to live on in the way it obliges me to live. Now if I'd gone into business . . ."

Marqueray considered and rejected the practicableness of offering to lend his cousin as much money as he liked. "Cheer up," he said gently. "'More was lost at Mohacz field.' You're in the blues to-night; you'll feel better in the morning. By-the-bye, wouldn't Colonel West like to look at the *Westminster*? Right, I'll dash down with it myself."

By the clock in the hall it was not a quarter past six. Twenty minutes inclusive to Lady's Bridge station, fifteen minutes back, three to drag his evening clothes out, seven

to put them on. . . . Softly Marquera y turned the handle of the door and let himself out into the night. . . .

Followed a good plain dinner of five courses washed down with sound claret and a bottle of more than respectable port: a dinner entirely uneventful except that Colonel Wynn-West sent a sarcastic message to the kitchen about the cheese straws, contradicted his wife twice and his daughter once, and inquired if Aubrey wouldn't prefer a glass of milk and a Plasmon biscuit. But these were all evidently accustomed amenities, which startled no one, least of all Marquera y. He was more surprised when, the ladies having left the room, Colonel West plunged at length into discussion of the coming fray, for then he began to realize that the ex-hussar, though a gadfly to his family, wanted neither brains nor force of character in out-of-door life. He had a shrewd, melancholy eye for political shifts, and as he ran on, leaning his cheek on his thin hand and holding Marquera y with his dark, petulant glance, in spite of an expanding waistcoat he recovered a lost likeness to the handsome, melancholy warrior of West's portrait—yes, and to West himself, as he might have been after a disappointing career, heart trouble, and premature retirement. But the father certainly had not a happy effect on his son. Marquera y found the conversation oppressive. It was not pleasant to be cross-examined about Aubrey's position and prospects while Aubrey sat by, faintly smiling, throwing in a word now and then, and generally getting snubbed for his pains.

In the long evening of bridge and Schumann—dull to Marquera y, who was not enough of a musician to appreciate Caroline's precise and strong touch—the same process was carried on, and Mrs. West amiably fell in with it. To Marquera y it was irritating, not to say painful, to see his cousin shouldered so negligently into the background, and West's unaffected good humor only made the elder man more indignant. West was ruefully patient: always with

his father: almost always with his mother: rarely otherwise even with Tommy, who was at home (to Marqueray's regret) because his school had broken up early for measles, and with Daffy, Tommy's loyal ally, who was at home because Colonel West, like the parent in *Punch*, had begun to economize by cutting down his daughter's education. (It did not soothe Marqueray, then or later, that Tommy and Daffy conceived a wholehearted admiration of their new cousin, and straggled at his heels in dumb, doglike, inexacting devotion. He was not so patient with them as West was, and once at least, when from pure affection they set out to scrub the brasswork of the Raymond-Ray with Tommy's own patent polishing concoction of bath brick and benzoline, he cuffed their heads together harder than they had ever been cuffed before.)

Marqueray had, however, on that first evening at Lady's Bridge consolation of his own. While Colonel West made trumps on a no-trump hand, and Aubrey asked his mother if she played to hearts, and Mrs. West plaintively replied that she supposed she must but she would rather not, Marqueray in his second mind was thinking of the discreet but long and explicit telegrams which he had sent secretly flying through the night. One was for Vere's agent at Herold three miles away, and the other was for Vere in Wellwood Square.

CHAPTER XX

But oh, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes!

AND next morning the reply to Marqueray's second wire came to hand in the form of a long telegram to Aubrey West. Vere invited West to fight the election from Herold. He was giving orders to his agent to keep open house for the county. Cars, carriages, menservants, and maidservants, all the resources of the Herold stables and the Herold cellar and the Herold kitchen were placed without reserve at his disposal. As Aubrey would not have much time to spare, Dan had better play host, "which will keep him out of mischief": but the staff were being instructed to hold themselves responsible to West, so that Dan would enjoy only a delegated authority. Vere wrote this with a sparkling eye: Marqueray had asked him to give the reins to West: good, he would do it with a vengeance, and let Dan see how he liked it! But the only person he made uncomfortable was West, who could not imagine why such a snub should be administered to Dan, his senior and Vere's heir; and when in despair he put the telegram into Marqueray's hand, even West was consoled by Marqueray's shout of laughter. Uncle and nephew evidently understood each other: eternal schoolboys both, their friendship looked to West rather like a dog-fight, but since it satisfied them he could only shrug his shoulders and wish he, too, were young enough to enjoy ragging and being ragged.

And then West gave a great sigh of relief and despatched Tommy to Herold for a car, in which he migrated the same

day, taking Marqueray, Caroline, and Edward with him. His father was offended and his mother confused, but both were soon reconciled to a change which saved the quiet household so much worry and expense; while for West the temporary dislocation of plans—soon mended, Herold being on the telephone—was repaid ten times over in the first twenty-four hours by the peace, the freedom, the elbowroom which Herold gave him. Merely to be able to set aside a big room, properly warmed and lit, for committee meetings, merely to know that, if he brought twenty people in to lunch, lunch would automatically arrive, made more difference to West's mental outlook than those understand who have never endured straitness of means.

West was exceedingly grateful to Vere, and said so to Marqueray, who smiled and replied that "Bobby was certainly playing up for once." This was mere irony, for the rich, indolent man, always generous but rarely thoughtful, had practically written to Marqueray's dictation, but it suited a certain delicacy of temper in Marqueray to work in the dark. He was too fond of West to lay him under an open obligation. He had played many a double game in his time, but none so tender and magnanimous as now between West and Robert Vere.

Politically he turned out to be a very useful supporter. Colonel West had old-fashioned ideas on the subject of horseflesh, and West would have been short of conveyances if Marqueray had not telephoned to Whitehall and to Dorsetshire, not to speak of Wellwood Square. He had three cars of his own, and he wrung another out of Vere. He used to come round for orders, always cheerful and smiling, in the famous Raymond-Ray every morning at nine or ten o'clock, and pick up West and carry him off, sometimes into Cambridge to attend committee meetings or interview his organizers, and sometimes into outlying districts where in November the roads were half under water and the women with their singsong, musical drawl promised to

bring their men to hear Mr. West speak if it didn't rain too hard and they could get through the mud. He was never tired, no hostility ruffled him, and West to the end of his life remembered with astonishment the lunches and dinners which Marqueray contrived to get out of the most unlikely looking inns.

What was even more important was that he threw into the scale the whole weight—no negligible factor—of Herold interest. Robert Vere was one of the few large landed proprietors in a county where people usually say "Our Squire is the Board," and his family had held the soil for many hundreds of years. The Wests were mushrooms in comparison: and Colonel Wynn-West, though respected, was not popular, while his wife did not come forward in public life except now and then rather under protest to open a bazaar or shed a mild glow of patronage over a charity concert. But Robert Vere was the sort of man who sets a deep mark wherever he goes. The Wynn-Wests lived at Lady's Bridge in modest comfort, and drove about in a single brougham or a dogcart, and entertained country neighbors to mild and inexpensive country entertainments. But Robert Vere would come up once in a twelvemonth and fill his house with Londoners and blaze about the Roman roads in high-powered cars, and his French chef and his powdered footmen and his racing stud and wines and big, unconventional festivities, and the social and political and theatrical stars who shone at them, and the valets and guns and dogs of the men, and the diamonds and French dresses of the ladies furnished his district with scandal for the rest of the year. There was not the slightest ground for scandal, and perhaps no one believed there was, but human nature in country neighborhoods will scarcely hold the big folk to have done their duty if they have not provided a text for the holding up of hands. As well have no aristocracy at all, as have one that does not give the proletariat a chance of congratulating itself on its superior virtue!

The Prime Minister's wife's evening dresses were worth a good many votes to Aubrey West.

Marqueray filled his uncle's shoes. The great gates of Herold were thrown wide, beds were aired, cellars and larders were ransacked, and in Mr. Vere's name hospitality was offered to half the county. It was understood all over South Cambridgeshire that the Veres of Herold—the family behind the man—were backing young West with all their might and all their money. Corruption and intimidation were, as every one knows, extinct forces in English political life long before the war: and yet—and yet—all over the Vere estates there was that hazy and ill-defined—and no doubt ill-founded—feeling that it would be a good thing to vote the way “Mr. Dan” wanted one to vote.

West needed all the support he could get, for the Opposition candidate, Charles Day, was an able man, and had been nursing the constituency for four or five years. He was a pleasant-looking, personable fellow, with a big house at Shepreth and a very pretty, lively wife and plenty of money, and his local influence was stronger than Colonel West's, though less formidable than the feudal feeling on which Vere's proxy pulled his shameless weight. He had opposed Deever at the last election, and had been defeated only by a small majority. He had held a minor post in a War Administration, spoke fluently, and had done good work on reorganization committees. That he was an old Parliamentary hand was naturally in his favor, for West, buried in his private secretaryship, was still untried and in country circles unknown; that he had been defeated last time was, as naturally, the best of reasons for giving him a consolation vote now; and he scored again because he had a less sincere and judicial mind than West, and, not being able to see more than his own side of a contentious question, was quicker to decide on it and to present his audience with those readymade catchwords, the pap of the political menu, which a scientific brain abhors. Aubrey West had

always to be on his guard against the dangers of over-refining.

But it was a good sporting contest, and West, though often tired, enjoyed every minute of it in the exhilaration of fighting for his own hand. After so many years in the background, it made him feel quite shy to find himself the focus of the limelight. After deviling for Yarborough's speeches, it was an excitement to draft notes for his own. West had made a remarkably good subordinate. He was now to test his power as a principal. Would he make good?

He asked this question of Marqueray, coming into his room late on a Wednesday evening four days before the election, when the rest of the house had gone to bed. It was not what he came to say, but it served him as an opening. This was their last evening in command of Herold, for Marqueray had screwed up Robert Vere from his original promise of a speech between trains into coming for two or three nights, and Yarborough, unasked, had offered to accompany him and throw his incalculable services into the breach. Impossible to refuse! and though Vere grumbled, and complained that the sly fox had forced his hand, it was fairly plain that he liked the chance of a silent, informal reconciliation with his old crony. Polling was to take place on Saturday, and they were to arrive with half a trainful of other guests on Thursday, West's nomination day, in time to speak at a big half-holiday meeting in Madinglefield Town Hall.

Late though it was, Marqueray was not in bed. West had an idea that his cousin, in spite of his cheerful temper, was not getting much sleep. He was sitting by the fire in his pajamas, warming his bare feet and smoking one of his heavy cigars to soothe his mind after the agitation of a badly attended meeting in a cold and draughty barn, lent by a friendly farmer because no other building was available in the fortress of a small Opposition village.

There had been much heckling, and Marqueray's temper had been rasped. He was reading, to soothe it, the *Journal to Stella*.

"Did I make any impression on those fellows to-night, Dan?" West asked without preface.

"Difficult to say. They haven't much brains. You weren't up to form, either. Did the heckling put you off?"

"A little. I've a slow, logical mind which likes to work orderly from point to point, and I haven't had much practice in handling these discursive obstacles."

"There's no sense in them. One can't argue with a field hand. It isn't like a Mile End row where the men are all as sharp as needles."

"You're wrong; there is sense if one can only penetrate to it, but the approaches aren't easy. I was thinking all the time that Charles Day would have known better how to tackle them."

"He? Yes, he's good with the uneducated bobtail. He gives them the sort of chewed food they can digest. But then he isn't under any delusions about them as you are. You're a trifle too apt to expect mental co-operation. What is it? You don't talk over their heads—your language is exquisitely simple, you use wonderfully nice English, I can always enjoy listening to you: but sometimes you think over their heads."

"Very dull of me," said West, frowning. "I mustn't do it."

"No, try not to. You see,"—Marqueray shut up the *Journal to Stella* and threw himself back in his chair,—
"you haven't had a very varied experience of men. You've lived all your life among the upper classes, and an intellectual set at that. You never have mixed much with the average brainless chap who can't think and don't want to. You've been abroad a good bit, but not off the beaten track. You only had four months in the ranks. You

aspire to govern democratically, but you don't know much about your little friends, the proletariat."

"Quite true," said West. "Have you hurt your shoulder?—What's the mark on it, then—a bruise?"

"No, an old scar."

"Of the war? It looks like some sort of pattern." He leaned forward to examine it. Marqueray's silk coat was partly unbuttoned, and on the fair skin, three inches below the collar-bone, the design of a Greek cross set in a circle perhaps an inch and a half in diameter stood out in the dark red of a well defined cicatrice.

"Only the brand of a secret society I used to belong to in Russia——"

"Are you joking?"

"No; why should I be? Do you think there are no secret societies left on earth?—Precisely what I say: you judge all men by the polite, gentle standards of Bond Street or Petty Cury."

He refastened his coat, smiling at West, who had in his astonishment forgotten the ill-tempered meeting and Marqueray's cruel comment on it. "But what on earth did they do to you, and why did you let them do it? Who were they?"

"As before I was admitted I took a tremendous oath never to reveal that mystery, you will excuse me from answering your rather guileless question. I had and still have considerable sympathy with their methods as well as with their aims.—Are you really interested? This"—he touched his breast—"was part of the ordinary rite of initiation. It served to frighten off a good many of the sort we didn't want: your agent provocateur dearly loves his own skin: and there was no way of dodging it: we all underwent it, every man Jack of us! Oh, childish if you like—but Russians are children and easily impressed. Besides, you must remember that Russia during the collapse wasn't exactly like Soho. We were only plotting social

reconstruction, but it was more dangerous for us to discuss railway transport in a Moscow garret than to incite to murder in Hyde Park. I never have felt so near to a swift and uncomfortable death as I did on one or two of our Monday nights, when we sat chatting and working out our calculations with no light in the room but what came through the window from factories that were being looted and burnt by the mob."

"Few Englishmen know much about Russia."

"Few now, fewer still before the war. All those great, blind, drifting movements of an imaginative uneducated nation were summed up for most of you in 'Nihilist' and 'despot.' Tell you what, Aubrey: next time you want to refer to Russian politics, don't you go to Blue Books. Turn up me instead. Nothing makes one understand the working of a system better than to have been nearly shot by both sides of it."

"Your cross was a symbol, then," said West.

"If you like to call it so. . . ." He sat for a moment musing, his chin dropped on his hand. "Oh no, it was nothing really. I was brought in blindfold, and the men who led me—*fratres jurati*, my guarantors, you know—read over the vows and asked if I was willing to submit to the initiation. I swore on an ikon. Then Serge asked if I would prefer to lie on a sofa or to keep my feet. I said Thanks, I'd rather take it standing up. After that Serge took the bandage off my eyes and told me to open my shirt, two men took me by the elbows, and another fellow came up carrying an electric brazier and a branding iron, and in a tick the thing was done. Naturally it hurt a bit! Not too much. I recollect," he grinned to himself, "the one thing that made me shiver was Serge's thoughtful advice to me to pull my shirt well back, because if I didn't stand still and the hot iron touched the stuff it might set my clothes on fire."

"I'll guarantee you stood still."

"Oh, rather," Marqueray replied simply. "I bet Serge that I wouldn't move an eyelash, and I won. As I was the only Englishman in the Society, we agreed that a slight amount of swank was no more than my duty to my country. Serge put me up beforehand to what I was to expect, and suggested—he had no business to do it—a local anæsthetic. But I wouldn't take that tip after he confessed that it wasn't etiquette. There were other ceremonies that weren't too pleasant, but I sat out the evening on six cups of Irma Vlassievna's hay-colored tea. I dare say you, my Aubrey, would have complained that I was a little too jaunty, but it went all right in Moscow, and I wasn't going to have them say an Englishman funk'd their beastly ritual."

"I envy you."

"But I'm no good," Marqueray followed the cross-cut with facility. "I'm only a man of action. You're a man of thought and action too." West fidgeted; he had not yet said what he came to say. But Dan's conversation was apt to slip away from Dan's affairs. "You only need a little more experience of the rougher side of life,—not the harder but the rougher,—and you'll get that now you're on your own. Never worry, we'll bring you in! The best man will win—he generally does, in my experience: and you're a better man than Charles Day for all his glib tongue. Unless anything untoward should crop up, I've not much fear of the issue. You're not nervous, are you?"

"Not nervous, but very anxious. Hood says it will be touch and go, and I should be wretched if I let Yarborough down just now, when his position is so difficult, in the House and out of it. He wouldn't soon forgive me for doing it. The Government majority is low enough already."

"H'm . . . and it's important to you to stand well with Yarborough, isn't it?" said Marqueray with his shrewd smile. "Well, he and Vere will be here to-morrow—to-day

I ought to say, for it's two o'clock already. What train are they coming by?"

"Eleven o'clock from King's Cross. It's to stop for them at Harston and will get in about five minutes past twelve."

"Miss Yarborough's coming too, isn't she?" West assented. "I'm so glad," said Marqueray, innocent-eyed. "I've scarcely seen her since the Mile End row, but she won my heart that night, she was so very plucky and she never made any fuss. Pity she couldn't come before; we could have done with a few more pretty women to offset Mrs. Day."

"I thought you didn't admire Miss Yarborough."

"I didn't, but I do now. I used to be afraid of her. She was satirical, and I never know what to say to satirical women. But she's more merciful now, and I like the way her eyes soften when she talks to people." He was playing on West's nerves, and he knew it, and West knew that he knew it, but West made no sign except for a slight fixed flush. "Will she come with us to Madingfield this afternoon? Then you must buck up and be a credit to yourself. But you will, I know you will; a full dress debate sets your genius. The draughts in that barn to-night would have cooled the ardor of a Napoleon." His gay confidence was catching, and West laughed and stretched himself in his chair, feeling the current of life run warm and zestful in his veins. "Go to," said Marqueray, giving him a friendly slap on the knee, "I foresee thunders of applause! Then we wind up with a State dinner at Herold, don't we? I had a consultation over that with Adolphe. He's on his mettle. We talked over the dishes. I withdrew all my suggestions and left the menu unreservedly to him. Vere always gets well served."

"Where shall you go when the election's over, Dan?"

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh, I don't know. Back to Russia, perhaps, to throw in my lot with the Young Russians. I'm very fond of Russia."

"So I've heard you say before. I wonder why."

"Is it so strange, considering that my mother was a Russian?" West made some inarticulate sound of surprise. "Didn't you know that?" West supposed that he must have heard it in his boyhood, but he had not had the faintest recollection of it. "Ah well, she was," said Marqueray, dusting a grain of ash from his sleeve. "Should you have taken me for a Westerner *pur sang*? God forbid! I thought you knew."

"No, I never knew."

Or had he known? As he said it he recovered a child's pictorial memory of a hot Sunday afternoon, a drawer full of miniatures, a young head with cloudy dark hair and blue eyes—and Mrs. West's ringed hand and placid voice: "Your cousin Danvers' mother, darling. Such a sad story. She was foolish enough to disobey the Russian Government, and they put her in prison, poor thing. . . ."

West looked up, rather white. "Dan, I'm an ass! I do remember."

"Do you? Yes, I see you do." Marqueray shrugged his shoulders. "Now do you wonder that I don't much mind being up against society?"

"It explains a good deal."

"In me? I suppose so. You can't expect to produce Church and State principles by crossing a Siberian 'political' with a redheaded Celt. If I went back, I should drop the mask and settle down to constructive political work in earnest. There's any amount of social reorganization to be done, and the Young Russians are a disciplined, united body. Old Serge is dead—shot in a maximalist riot in Petrograd and pitched into a canal to drown. But he didn't want to die in his bed and I don't know that I do either. There doesn't seem to be much room for me

in England. Yarborough is keeping hold of me to put this job through, but he'd never make systematic use of an unofficial tool as Vere did. As soon as we've tackled Marchmont, he'll hand me the key of the fields. Besides, I've grown rather sick of it lately." He smiled, between jest and earnest. "Mind you, my own opinion is unchanged. But I don't like having my face slapped."

"Do you think of leaving England for good, then?"

"Very likely. I've no ties to keep me here and never shall have: wife nor child, I'm done out of them."

"That reminds me," West said abruptly, "I had a line from Phyllida to-day." This was what he had come to say. "Stennis called on her on Monday." Stennis was the family solicitor into whose hands West had put Lady Marchmont's case after the failure of his own effort at mediation. "He's to go to Grosvenor Square this afternoon—Thursday," West continued, not without effort. "Marchmont has given him an appointment. Here is her letter if you care to see it; I've done with it."

"No, thanks."

West went on, though the rigid bronze profile gave him no encouragement. "She seems distressed because you haven't written to her for a day or two: wants to know if you're not well or only very busy. How am I to answer her? Do read it."

Marqueray took the letter from his cousin's hand and dropped it into the fire.

"I wrote to her to-night. What's the order of the speeches this afternoon—you first, then Vere, or *vice versa*?"

"Mr. Vere first," said West, getting up. "I'll say good night now, Dan."

"Good night," said Marqueray, and then—"I'm not—I didn't mean——"

"I know, I know."

"Don't do that," said Marqueray angrily. West had

done nothing except look at him with a mute, grieving pity. "I beg your pardon, Aubrey. I know I have an infernal temper just now. But this thing has to be as though it had not been. She can't understand that, bless her: she would like me to live near her and drop in on Sundays to tea. She'll be in one of her small rages to-morrow when she reads my letter. All the better, perhaps: a pinch of resentment will be a wonderful help towards a cure. Innocent, good God! she's more than innocent: she's a child still. She thinks she's safe." West was dumb. "She is safe," Marqueray collected himself, folding his arms. "But I must get out of England."

West nodded soberly. He, too, though reluctantly, thought that Marqueray was better out of the country for a little time. The one consoling reflection, never long absent from West's mind, was that Marchmont, unless his body belied him, was not likely to live long: if he died—and between his maladies and his morphia West thought him likely to die at any minute—the bar between Marqueray and Phyllida would be removed. This reflection can scarcely have failed to strike Marqueray also, but it never crossed his lips, and when West once distantly hinted at it his cousin remained deaf. Marqueray had his delicacies.

"I shall be sorry if you go back to Russia, but I can imagine that it will be wise for you."

"Never mind about Russia now," said Marqueray, lightly rising and stretching himself. "I shan't go back till I've seen you safely through South Cambs, not to speak of Eaton Square. And so God give you good health and the rank of a general!" He stood over West with his bright eyes and teasing laugh. "*Bozhe moi*, look at the clock! It's twenty to three, and you want all the beauty sleep you can get. Now you cut along and put yourself to bed, or you won't be in form for this afternoon, which would be no end of a pity. A keen politician, Miss Yar-

borough, isn't she? Ah! you should have seen her at Mile End. Cool as a cucumber, she didn't care a straw what happened to herself, she was gazing with all her eyes at the platform. Any one could see with half a glance that she was deeply interested in the fate of some happy man——"

"Oh, drop it, Dan, for Heaven's sake!" said West, very red, and retreating to the door.

"Dear me, mayn't one say that Miss Yarborough was gazing at her own father?" Marqueray mildly expostulated.

"Ha, ha, sold again!"

CHAPTER XXI

Then, as my gift and thine own acquisition
Worthily purchased, take my daughter.

WHEN the twelve o'clock train from King's Cross drew up at Harston, Marqueray was waiting on the platform. He wanted ten words with Vere before Vere met West, and by furtive maneuvering he got Yarborough and Val and some other social stars brought from town by Vere into a couple of Herold cars, while Vere and he were left alone to follow on foot, much to Vere's satisfaction. It was one of those warm and windless November mornings when the sun comes in and out among quiltings of white and blue, and all over the level countryside, over pale gleaming stubble, or sere pasture, or dark of plowed earth, every tree flung not a shadow but a golden glow from its millions of gold leaves. After having played chess with Yarborough from King's Cross to Harston, Vere was in an amiable temper and prepared to enjoy a stroll and a wrangle with Dan, and he loved the familiar way through the woody village and along a field road, then past clipped yews in a waterside flower garden and over the bridge by Harston Mill. But while they lingered on the bridge and Dan unfolded his mind, under the honey-colored timbers of the mill and its high gilt vane, Vere grew very grave.

Behind them the steady pressure of water drummed upon the planking of the mill in a dull, endless throbbing like the throbbing of a human heart; before them it came gushing out from under an arch of the bridge in a contracted torrent, green as green glass, but shot through and

interwoven with millions of subaqueous bubbles, pearl white, milk white, rolling over and over one another and intertwining in a watery skein, before they dissolved into the jade green waters of the pool, brimmed and quiet within their woodland bastion, which in their turn fledged darkly away under a gold roof of chestnuts high interlaced. Vere sat down sideways on the embayed stone coping of the bridge, and Marqueray leaned against it near by. Their voices were almost drowned in the heavy arterial throbbing of the river. After a time Marqueray ceased to argue or plead, but Vere gave him no answer, and both remained motionless for some minutes, while the sunshine quivered in flakes of pale fire upon the green, bubbling water, and a bird came down to drink at the edge. At length Marqueray roused himself and turned towards Vere.

"Do this for me, Bobby. You've always been very good to me. Do this one thing more for me. We've never refused each other anything yet."

"But you've never asked anything like this of me. I don't like alienating property. You'll be sorry for it yourself when you want to settle down."

"I shall never settle down," said Marqueray lightly. "As soon as our little fight with March is fought to a finish, I shall clear out of England and probably never come back. Don't look to me to be the prop of your declining years, Robert."

"Aye, is it so?" said Vere, his handsome, high-bred face a trifle bleached. Marqueray sat down and smiled level into his eyes.

"I'll come when you send for me, sir."

"You wouldn't have gone so far as that a year ago," grumbled Vere. "What's come of your signet ring?"

"I lost it a fortnight since."

"How do you go about to lose a signet ring? It was your father's; I wouldn't have parted with it for anything. But you of the younger generation don't care for

a mere sentiment." Marqueray shrugged his shoulders. It was true that a year ago he would have held on his own way reckless of Vere's regret and disappointment: he was more sympathetic since he had learned for himself what cruel pain mere sentiment can inflict. "Herold ought to come to you, to my brother's son."

"Oh well, when all's said and done, I'm only your half-brother's son."

"I know. But I loved your father, Dan."

Marqueray met Robert Vere's eyes again, and for a long moment they held him with their grave scrutiny, dissatisfied and saddened. Under their penetration Marqueray's stoic calm began to falter. All his life he had been more English in his reserve with Vere than with any one else, but Vere's unacknowledged influence had always been strong, and in this hour it became irresistible. Vere laid his hand on Marqueray's arm, and Marqueray turned away. Through the throbbing of the water he heard his own voice saying quietly, as if the stream carried his will away with it, "And I loved him too, sir, but since I was fifteen I haven't missed him much. You've been more to me than most fathers are to their sons."

"Ah!—Yes? Go on: you owe me this."

"Do I, sir? I'd like to pay any debt I owed you. . . . Do you want me to tell you that I've always looked to you as if you were my father? I think you know that." Marqueray stooped down and picked up a flat pebble from the roadway, and with a boy's underhand sweep of his arm sent it skimming low along the surface of the water, once, twice, thrice kissing the ruffled pool before it sank. The chaffinch that had come down to drink flew away with a protesting flutter of frightened wings. "Oh, poor little beggar, I didn't mean to startle him! . . . It's as a son that I come to you now, sir."

"This isn't the sort of thing sons generally ask of their fathers, Dan."

"I should like to see Aubrey comfortable before I——"

"Before *what*?" said Vere. He sprang up. "Good God, what do you mean?"

"Nothing! nothing, on my honor! I don't know why I put it like that. I didn't mean to. Oh, I am an ass!" said Marqueray remorsefully. "I've startled you now as well as the chaffinch."

"You're not ill? There's nothing wrong with you? You wouldn't hide that from me, old fellow, would you?"

"Ill? Do I look it?" He did not: standing erect, his bronze head bare to the November sunshine, Marqueray was a model of lean and vigorous health. "No, on my honor, I'm as well as ever I was and haven't a shadow of reason for thinking I shall drop out these fifty years."

Vere sat down again rather heavily. "Then all the more I don't understand. You boys never think of anything beyond the immediate moment. You're rich enough for a bachelor, but one of these days you'll marry, and you're safe to have a lot of children——" He stopped short. For his life Marqueray could not have controlled his face from changing. "Ha! now we have it," said Vere. His hand fell again on Marqueray's arm. "Out with it! Good God, Dan, you don't mean to tell me that any woman has refused you?"

"No."

"What is it, then?" Marqueray was speechless. "There is a woman, is there? She isn't—dead?"

"No, I wish she were." Marqueray smiled faintly. Well, if Vere cared so much to know——! Again he heard his own voice like a voice in a dream, speaking under cover of the rushing of the river, and with little more volition than a leaf has when the river carries it away. "She's married to another man. I could take her from him if I liked, but I'd rather die than do anything that would hurt her. I shall get over it, but for the present I'm finding it rather a facer. No, I shan't get over it." He crossed his

arms on the coping and laid down his head. "I shall never marry any one else. Believe it or not as you like, but I don't want any other woman if I can't have her. Be gentle with me, Robert, I don't want to talk about it any more."

Marqueray had only said what most men say when they cannot get what they want, but unlike most men Vere believed him. The cynic who had all his life held that one woman was as good as another was obliged to recognize a temperament different from his own, and the recognition was very bitter. "Dan, Dan," he muttered, keeping his hand on Marqueray's arm: and then through the humming pulse of the mill, which made bridge and coping vibrate, Vere felt the deeper pulse of human suffering, the distress which no friendship can comfort. . . . Marqueray stood up, brushing the dust from his sleeve.

"Come along in to lunch now; I don't care to be late. You're going to do what I want, aren't you, Bobby?"

"Oh! have your own way, have your own way," Vere growled. "It's a damned silly way, but—I never could say no to your father, Dan."

"Aubrey!"

Six or seven hours later, on his way to his own room to change for dinner, West stood still in surprise before Val's open door. Val was already dressed, and even the unobservant secretary could not fail to be struck by her aspect. Marqueray had once said of her—not in West's hearing—"A clever woman who is not handsome is not clever," but to-night Val had triumphed over his epigram, which was so far true that as a rule she wore the simple, elegant dresses chosen for her by a good dressmaker. Val was not simple and not merely elegant, and for the gala night at Herold she had designed her own clothes; flowing and rather bizarre raiment of silver and black and emerald, which

left her neck and arms bare but for a Chinese clasp below the shoulder. Dark and sparkling, alive with green flames that flickered about her from head to foot, she was cynically well aware that for once she could hold her own with any woman in Herold, and she had too strong a strain of Yarborough's practical blood in her to underrate a weapon because she scorned it.

"Aubrey, do stop a minute! I haven't had ten words with you all day, and I want to congratulate you."

"I should love to be congratulated," said West, smiling. "But I can't talk to you in the corridor, can I?"

"Oh, come in for a moment," said Val upon impulse, "what does it signify? There isn't a quiet nook to be found downstairs." West shrugged his shoulders and followed her in. It was exceedingly sweet to him to be alone with Val, whom he had not seen privately since Deever's death a fortnight ago; few minor trials wear a man's nerves more than to be thrown into the company of the woman he loves but never alone with her; West had drilled himself to keep quiet, but to-night, when the strain was lifted, or lifting, he felt how heavy it had been. His heart was beating rapidly when he shut Val's door behind him.

"Did you like your room and are you comfortable?" he asked, still smiling at her with irrepressible tenderness. "I'm so glad. Did you like your flowers?"

"Did you put them?"

"Of course I did. You seem to forget that I'm your host. Mr. Vere has lent me Herold for the election. You're staying with me. In that capacity and as an old friend I'm going to admire you. I never saw you in such a wonderful dress before. Did you put it on to dazzle Cambridgeshire?"

"No, in your honor. Aren't we all here in your honor?" She stuck out one sparkling foot, her emerald and silver

skirts falling away over her ankle. "Did you ever see anything so brave as these slippers, sir? Say you think they suit me."

"Charming," said West, examining them through his eyeglass. "Personally I should never look at your slippers when—But they do suit you. Why do you so seldom wear jewels? You can, and most women can't."

The jewels were reflected in Val's eyes under these compliments, expressed and implied. "Enough! enough! This isn't what I called you in to say. Aubrey, you spoke splendidly! I wish you could have heard what the Chief said, driving home. I never heard you speak like it before."

"Don't, don't," said West with an agitated laugh. "Don't flatter me—not you. This sort of thing goes to one's head, and I'm not used to it."

"Ah, but it's time you were. Poor boy, you've been starving on the crumbs that fell from the Chief's table! But now you're coming into your kingdom." She was trying to recover her old merry manner, but her effort was not altogether successful. No adventure reflects more fiery luster on a man than to stand up before an audience which he has completely dominated, and which roars with laughter at his jokes and holds its breath at his pathos and cheers his enthusiasm till the chandeliers ring. "I wouldn't have believed you could speak like that," Val murmured. "You're always clever, and you can always make people listen to you as you did at that Mile End meeting. But this afternoon you threw your cap over the mill! Real oratory, the Chief called it. You're so English, I wouldn't have believed you would ever let yourself go like that."

". . . Afraid . . . made rather a fool of myself," West stammered.

"Oh! don't be a—a goose!" Val's voice was petulant. "You didn't, and you know you didn't; you never made a

single slip. Don't be modest, or anyhow not with me. You can laugh it off downstairs if you like, you hermit-crab, but we're—we're old friends, you said so just now, and to me you mustn't pretend that you lost your head or said more than you meant, or—or anything except that for once you were absolutely sincere. You are sincere: the Chief said to Mr. Vere, 'Aubrey would rather be a statesman out of office than a politician in office.' Mr. Vere said, 'So would I,' and the Chief laughed and said, 'So would I, Bobby': and so he would, though Mr. Vere scoffed at him: that's why you and he are at heart in sympathy."

"And are you and I at heart in sympathy, too?" West asked with a gleaming eye. He took Miss Yarborough by the tips of her fingers and kissed her hand. "Thank you, Val: there's no one but you that would ever say this to me. It's very sweet. It mayn't be good for me to be flattered, but I do like it."

"You look as if you liked it," Val murmured with her dark blush, partly turning away but leaving her fingers in his clasp. "Dear Aubrey, do you think you ought to kiss my hand?"

"I do not," said West. "I ought not to be in here at all. But I'm sick of doing as I ought——"

"Aubrey!"

He actually stamped his foot as he dropped her arm and set his back to the door. "Hang it, do you think I've had such a jolly time of it these last three or four years?"

"I don't understand you," Val murmured, escaping to the window in the hope that West's shortsighted eyes would be unable to see her agitation across the room. "You're not a bit like yourself to-night. You look—different."

"I feel different. Is there time for me to tell you why? I didn't mean to say anything about it till Saturday, but I've waited so long that I don't want to wait two days

longer. I'm sick of waiting. May I go on?" Val was not any more anxious to wait till after the election than West was. "Mr. Vere called me into his room after lunch. As you know, I shouldn't have taken up political life at all but for his great generosity. My people are not rich, and there are several of us to be provided for, and of course when my father dies his pension will die with him. Consequently I've always been rather pinched for money, because I've had to try to save out of what Mr. Vere allowed me. He gave me—I'm not keeping you?—four hundred a year, which is not too much for a man in my position." Val nodded. "But this afternoon he told me he was going to alter all his arrangements. He's childless, and there's no one who has much claim on him except dear old Dan Marqueray, and Dan has more of his own than he knows what to do with. I confess I don't much like stepping into Dan's shoes. But I'm not consulted. The long and the short of it is that Mr. Vere is going to increase my allowance from next January to a couple of thousand a year, and I'm to go down in his will as his heir. Herold is to come to me. It seems all wrong when it ought to go to Dan. But it is to be so, and Dan concurs. After all he has a beautiful place of his own and never goes near it."

"Oh, I am glad!" said Val from her heart. "Oh, that is good of Mr. Vere! It's not as if Dan Marqueray were his own son, or a poor man either—he won't care: and those two understand each other very well, I wouldn't worry over that. But for you it means freedom and independence; you won't have to overwork so desperately, and you'll be able to snap your fingers at the Patronage Secretary because you won't feel that your income depends on getting into office. I'm always very sorry for young members who haven't much beyond their £400 a year; it's a galling position for a proud man. But this means that you'll be able to be as unpractical as you like."

"It means something else besides that. It means that I shall be in a position to marry—to ask a woman to marry me." Val murmured a little "Oh!" under her breath. Politeness apart, in West's mind the terms were apparently synonymous. "Mr. Vere isn't a changeable man, and after my formal adoption as his heir I shan't have any hesitation—Good heavens, my dear girl, here comes your father!"

It was indeed Yarborough's unmistakable, swinging, gipsy tread, and West with a comical look started away from the door. Val's face was burning, but whether purely from confusion it would have been hard to say: her brown skin had begun to glow before Yarborough's step was heard. Certainly there was more irritation in her manner than alarm. "He *will* make me tie his tie for him," she explained, and then ingenuously enough, "Oh dear! are we never to have five minutes in peace together?" West was no less irritated, but neither of them thought of sending Yarborough away, though it would have been easy for Val to invent a pretext for locking her door. Instead of that she opened it before Yarborough had time to knock.

"Don't be shocked," she said apologetically. "I haven't had a quiet word with Aubrey all day."

Yarborough examined his secretary with a divided eye. West, rather red—he was both less guilty than Miss Yarborough and more embarrassed—stood his ground manfully, though with Val looking on it would have been hard, that night, to endure one of Yarborough's sardonic ratings. But Yarborough in the end broke into a laugh. "Upon my word, young people, is it the latest fashion to have your quiet words in one another's bedrooms? Be off, Aubrey, you'll be late for dinner. Here, don't go," he detained the young man with a hand on his sleeve. "I want a quiet word with you too, Mr. Secretary. Who put you up to what you said this afternoon?" West opened his eyes.

"No one—I suppose I put myself up to it. What do you mean, sir?"

"Firebrand!" said Yarborough mockingly. "You've hidden your light under a bushel, and I took it for a farthing dip. I'm dazzled by your brilliance, young man. Here, you, Val, tell us what you thought of it: you've heard enough speeches by now to tell an orator from an Irishman."

He made her glow like her own jewels. "I've already told Aubrey what I think of it. You tell him now. Don't grudge him what he's fairly earned."

"Not I," said Yarborough. "Fill him up with champagne and bonbons, not I. One leaves that to the women. Some of it was unutterable rubbish. I'm going to give you a dressing down by and by for what you said about the Russian revolutionary movement. Aha! facts wrong, my boy, facts wrong. Very pretty, but no substance. I'll give you such a pickling when I get back to my papers. I'll make you sorry you spoke! All wrong, Aubrey: legitimate inferences from totally false premises." The passage having been both inspired and revised by Marqueray, this threat left West unmoved. "But the rest of it wasn't so bad." He swayed the young man gently to and fro, his hand on West's shoulder. Such praise, unaccustomed from any man, and sweetest of all from Yarborough, had indeed gone to West's head like champagne: with sparkling eyes and confused lips, he dared not look at Val. "Wait till you see the morning papers. They're going to be civil to you now."

"Oh, who takes any notice of a bye?" said West, struggling to resist the influence of such sweet poison, because he knew that if he once openly set his lips to the cup, Yarborough's mocking humor would dash it away from him. Yarborough could praise royally, but reserving the right to tear his victim limb from limb at the first symptom of complaisance.

"That depends on who fights the bye. Men who count are taken notice of whatever they do. I saw a *Times* reporter in the hall to-day, and I said a word to him myself. You'll count fast enough if you get in, and I'll guarantee you will get in. Pity you haven't more money; in public life a man's badly handicapped if he's badly off. You should marry a rich girl, Aubrey. Put your pride in your pocket and look out for some one that will give you a leg up in your career. It will be a level match, cash against brains." Satan in a fit of benevolence might have worn Yarborough's smile. "If her people make trouble, tell me and I'll talk to them. You're not a pauper. You've four hundred a year from Vere besides your home allowance and what you get from me. Even if Vere refused to make up your income,—which he ought to do if he looks to you to represent the family instead of that slippery fellow Dan Marqueray,—when you get into the House you'll be in a position to pay your addresses to a richer woman than yourself. Pick her out, tell me, and I'll tackle her father if he's obdurate. Hey, Aubrey?"

"Thanks, sir," said West.

It was not clear to him, then or later, how he got out of Val's room and back to his own. He did not fairly recover his wits till he had bathed and dressed and philosophically lectured himself back into a state of calm; and even then he was so unlike himself that Marqueray, coming in to add his own private leaf to the laurels that had been thrown on West in Madingfield Town Hall, was startled. "Hallo! what on earth have you been doing to yourself?" he said, examining West with a critical eye. West gave a nervous laugh and turned away. "I say," said Marqueray seriously, "have you been fortifying yourself with a little glass? What is it, old fellow? you look half drunk."

"I'm not, but I shall be if I don't stick to water at dinner," West said candidly. "I wish I had a head like yours! No, it's nothing, only—only everything seems to

have come to me at once. I say, do you think I really shall get in? It seems too good to be true. 'There's many a slip'—Hood is getting almost too confident, isn't he? Elections are tricky things. You never can tell till the votes are counted. But I've set my heart on getting in. Yarborough never would forgive me if I let him down now." He turned round suddenly and seized Marqueray by the wrists. "Dan, you know what Mr. Vere wants to do for me. On your honor you don't mind? It ought to go to you."

"Herold, you mean?"

"Yes. Oh, Dan, Yarborough as good as told me half an hour ago that if I get in for South Cambs I can ask him for Val! He doesn't even know about Herold either, or Mr. Vere's amazing generosity. Do you wonder I'm rather off my head? But I hate taking it from you."

"What good would Herold be to me?" said Marqueray.

West, fastidious as a rule, flashed out into an imprecation as strong as had ever sprung to Marqueray's lips. Marqueray smiled—"All right, all right, I only meant that I've plenty of my own. Besides, I shall be out of England in a week or two, when Yarborough has settled up with March."

"When *Yarborough* has settled up with March?"

"Yes, I'm not going to interview Marchmont after all."

"Is that Mr. Yarborough's doing?"

"No, my own. I had a chat with him on the terrace after lunch and broke the news to him. He was rather sick about it: said that as I'd done my own dirty work so far I might as well make a clean job of it. But I was cautious and declined, not feeling certain that the F.O. would back me up if I killed him."

West had never given Marqueray much detail of the scene in Grosvenor Square, which he had euphemistically summed up as "not a success." Recalling it, and his own impulse to violence, an impulse which in all his placid life

he had never felt before, he was divided between disappointment and relief. "Heaven forgive me, I'm rather sorry. I was looking forward to your punishing him, Dan."

"So was I. It is not my way to leave a score unpaid. But what did you say yourself? That any other man in England might tackle him with greater propriety than I. When I thought it over, it struck me that if I touched him Phyllida mightn't like it. He's her husband, after all. It's not as if he were going to escape scot free. The Yard have established his connection with the Mile End riot, and the recent reply cables from Lima haven't left him a leg to stand on. Some one will wipe the ground with him—only it won't be I." West muttered "Hard lines!" under his breath. He guessed that it was bitter to Marqueray to drop his blade. "Nichevo—it doesn't matter," said Marqueray philosophically. "As soon as he's down and out I shall go back to Russia."

"I'm sorry for Mr. Vere."

"Yes, I'm sorry for Vere and I'm devilish sorry for myself, but it can't be helped. My English career is drawing to a close. Take my place. I'm not such a dog in the manger as to grudge it you. Go in and win, old fellow: you haven't had too much fun up to now, have you? But steady, man, steady: you look what my Scottish ancestors would have called 'fey.' " His superstitious fancy, which perhaps came to him from those same Scottish ancestors, warned him that West was courting ill luck. He would have liked to tell his cousin to touch wood.

CHAPTER XXII

O! that a man might know
The end of this day's business, ere it come;
But it sufficeth that the day will end,
And then the end is known.

MARQUERAY went out to supervise some final arrangements, and West finished dressing. He was preparing to go down to the state drawing-room, blazing with silver candlesticks and wreathed in rose trails from the famous Herold conservatories, when a servant knocked at the door. "A gentleman has rung you up, sir, on the telephone. He says his business is very important."

"Stennis—Mr. Stennis?" West exclaimed. He was expecting to get a letter from the solicitor in the morning, as the interview with Marchmont in Grosvenor Square had been fixed for that afternoon. But the gentleman had not given any name, and West ran down to the telephone room. He thought of calling Marqueray to join him, but did not in case it should turn out to be only a local call after all. He took up the receiver. There was a good deal of buzzing on the wires, and for a time he could hear nothing clearly, but at length a high, reedy whisper reached his ears: no, not a local call—a trunk call, a long distance one, from London probably: the voice was unfamiliar and not deep enough for Stennis: perhaps one of his clerks . . .

"Hallo. Are you there? I want Mr. West—Mr. Aubrey West."

"I'm Aubrey West. Who is it speaking?"

"Marchmont."

West nearly dropped the receiver. An irrational pang

of alarm darted through him. What could Marchmont want with him?

"Have you anything to say that can't be said through Stennis? I'm sorry to be abrupt, but we're all rather busy up here. We're in the thick of my election fight. There's a big political dinner on to-night, and it's now five-and-twenty past eight. I haven't much leisure or much head for business."

"I shan't keep you more than a minute or two, and I've already said it to Stennis. You'll get a letter from him in the morning. But for your own sake," over fifty miles of electric wire the derisive accent came faintly, delicately clear, "you had better know to-night."

"Go on, then."

"Well, it's about my wife. I saw Stennis this afternoon at three o'clock. He came primed with the demand for alimony which you put into his mouth. But before he went away, I had him piping in a minor key. You know, Aubrey, you were an ass not to begin by telling him you were Phyllida's lover. Then he would have warned you how far it was safe for you to go. When you're my age, you'll know better than to try and humbug your man of affairs. Lawyers hate to be let down by a client."

"Do you mind coming to the point?"

"I'm coming to it as fast as I can. What particularly annoyed him was the tit-bit a professional friend of mine wormed out of that pretty maid of yours, Jenny, Annie, what's her name?—Yes, a private detective: a verria respectable pairrson, and a devil of a hard case in a witness box. He couldn't get much out of Eliza, but he turned Annie inside out like a glove. Aubrey, why were you so vexed with that good old housekeeper of yours for locking up my wife's door?"

"I shan't listen to any more of this, Lord Marchmont. Unless you say what you have to say, I shall go back to my guests."

"I've instructed my own solicitor to file a petition for divorce against Phyllida. Need I tell you who will be posted to an edified world as co-respondent?" Strangely enough,—no doubt because he had been preoccupied with Marqueray's peril,—it had never crossed West's mind that Marchmont would take that step.

"No answer? Not a word? Poor devil! it does take some thinking over, doesn't it? Upon my soul I'm sorry for you, but it's no good asking me to hush it up. Electors have their rights, and if the Lower House is to keep the respect of the country, it must draw the line at dirty scandals like yours. Eh? I can't hear. 'Bring a libel action?' No, you don't. A formal announcement of my impending suit in all the local Opposition rags can't get any one on our side into trouble. About you, my friend, I'm not so sure. If that notice comes out on the eve of the poll, what's the betting on your chance? Very damaging to a rising young politician, Aubrey."

Ruin out and out: if Marchmont kept his word, the election was as good as lost.

"There'll be no detail in the papers," the impish voice ran on, "but I shouldn't wonder if some of the gingery bits came out all the same. I happen to know Charles Day. He's a nice fellow, but not—what shall I say?—not hyper-scrupulous. If I were to ring him up and tell him all about it, I don't feel sure that he and his friends—one never can silence one's friends—would keep it to themselves. It's rather a scabrous story! Do you think it was done with your usual discretion, Aubrey, to come to me for alimony? People will condone a romantic flight, but there wasn't much romance about that. The lover living on the husband's money! They won't leave you a rag for decency."

"You hound," said West, "you know your wife is innocent."

"Well, let her prove it, then. You poll on Saturday,

don't you? This is Thursday. I shall take no action till after midday to-morrow. If my wife before noon returns to me and consents to live with me as my wife, there will be no notices in the Friday evening papers, and the petition will not be filed. I beg your pardon, I didn't catch—Tut, tut, don't swear so, Aubrey! Can't you keep your temper?"

"For God's sake," stammered West, as the full force of Marchmont's alternative threat seized on him, "don't say that to Phyllida! I entreat you, Marchmont, I—oh, do anything you like to me, but for the love of God don't make that threat to her!"

"That cuts you, does it?"—over fifty miles of electric wire Marchmont's cruel laugh came as close as if he were in the same room,—“yes, I thought that would cut you. And yet you pretend to me that you aren't my wife's lover! Good night, West."

A clock was striking the half-hour as West came out into the hall. He walked up to a mirror and examined himself in it to see whether he would pass muster, but as he never had much color, and was practiced in self-control, this fear was unfounded. Marqueray, strolling through a flowered archway with pretty Margaret Fortrive on his arm, smiled carelessly at his cousin and passed on, having evidently noticed nothing.

Most of the house party were already gathered: a few, delayed by one accident or another in unfamiliar rooms, were coming down the branched Georgian staircase, the diamonds and floating dresses of the women lighting up its dark balustrade with sparkles and perfume. Among the last to descend were Yarborough and his daughter, Val moving languidly with lowered eyelids and as if there were a weight on her limbs: ever since West left her, she had been sitting dreaming by her open window, watching the moon rise over flat meadows, a broad gleam barred behind

the long, leafless fingers of pollard willows, or mirrored in brimming loops of the sluggish Cam. The evening air was chill, but Val was warm: she was enveloped in that mysterious cloud of pleasant fancy which knows nothing, which asks nothing, and which to any observant eye betrays the woman in love. All was still uncertain, for Yarborough had left West no time to come to terms. But—he had spoken of getting married. True, he hadn't said he wanted to marry her. But—he had kissed her hand. Poor Val, whose love had never received so much encouragement before, was content to leave it at that.

A good deal of whispered comment, warm and friendly, was passing about West and Val, though they were not aware of it. Echoes of it reached Riseley Yarborough, Marqueray, Robert Vere, none of whom were concerned to deny it: why should they? Yarborough, indeed, had practically owned to George Mallinson of the Treasury, who had a kindly feeling for young folks and enjoyed a touch of romance, that the engagement was only a matter of time and form.

Almost unconsciously Val now relinquished her father's arm for West's, and they went together into the beautiful dim room, where many glanced up and smiled at their significant entry. Certainly Valentine Yarborough was as darkly graceful as a witch in her emeralds, and as for West any one could see with half an eye that he was devoted to her. It was felt to be a pity that they had to separate, Val's cavalier coming up to claim her with a shade of diffidence in his manner, while West was drawn into a knot of men who were frankly talking politics. Soon dinner was announced, and West gave his arm to gentle Lady Grantchester, the second lady in the room, Robert Vere thus giving him open precedence of Marqueray. The Herold rooms were famous, so were the flowers, so were the wines: it was a picturesque scene: pure silver chandeliers full of waxen lights, Queen Anne bays overlooking

moonlit grass and river levels and startled troops of deer; china studded with turquoise and pale coral and pearls, Italian crystal in which Italian sunshine had been imprisoned by the glass-workers of old Venice; garlands of white and pink roses, perfumes that carried memories of the immemorial past, the grave, significant heads of the elder men, the fair delicacy of their wives and daughters, the universal effortless restraint . . .

West would have liked to stand up and announce his news. His brain was working double, and with one side of it he chatted to Lady Grantchester about the Herold roses, and sympathized with her regret that she lived on gravel instead of the Herold clay, while the other struggled with the dilemma on which Marchmont had impaled him. Either way, misery. Very likely Phyllida, to save West, would offer to go back to her husband. But if she did that, what would be her fate and what would Marqueray do? Impossible for West to purchase freedom at the price of her shame and his cousin's agony! But if proceedings were begun, nothing could be more certain than West's defeat on Saturday. If there had been time to fight the case, he might have won it and the seat together, but no agricultural constituency is going to return a man who has a divorce action hanging over his head. And the worst of it was that here again he could not stand up alone to the blow: it struck at Yarborough, it struck at the entire Ministerial party: it struck at Val, too! He could not drag her with him through the filth of the divorce court. "Engaged to the co-respondent!" He could hear London laughing.

The interminable meal wore on. It was slow, for the pageantry of the scene required a corresponding pageantry of service, and Adolphe, an artist at heart, had thrown himself into his job with energy and imagination. West touched neither food nor wine. His mental confusion was a torment, the room was now brilliant, now hazy, and

nothing but the discipline of long practice enabled him to escape observation. He did it, however, only excusing himself to Lady Grantchester, who chid him for eating nothing, on the plea of a headache, which, as Lady Grantchester owned, was what any one might have had after such an exciting day. And she glanced across at Val, who was sitting by the Chief Constable and listening to his notoriously dull conversation with that "rose pure and eternal" in her looks which a Tudor lover attributed to his mistress. Lady Grantchester would have been delighted to change places with Val; she thought precedence a great nuisance when it separated two young people who were so nicely and naturally in love with each other: and giving Val a motherly smile she began talking to West about her, admiring her dress and her hair, asking him about her pursuits, her preference for town or country life, her keen interest in politics: and what a pity it would be if Miss Yarborough did not marry a politician—she would make an ideal wife for a young leader: and did not Mr. West agree that one or two fresh Ministerial houses would be very welcome just now, one or two forward rallying points where the scattered units of the Advanced Guard could be brought into touch——?

The climax came when, by private treaty with Vere, in the stage of fruit and salted almonds before the ladies left the room, the Foreign Minister rose to propose the health of the candidate. There was a vein of poetry in Yarborough, and the hour, the setting, and a touch of personal emotion called it forth: subtle and strong, he was not afraid to appeal to the hearts even of a reticent educated audience, and he traveled so lightly over the thinnest of thin ice that no one could accuse him of an indiscretion. It was a finished and golden little speech, a tribute of praise from a man high in public life to one not unworthily following him into the arena—from the star in its zenith to the rising star: and when he bowed to West and raised

his glass, no one in the room doubted that he regarded West as a rising star, as a young man of distinction in whom the Foreign Minister was prepared to find a son-in-law. Every tone was warm with sincerity and kindly feeling.

Yarborough touched this personal note, not to Vere's surprise; but to Vere's surprise and gratification it was taken up. Quiet, undemonstrative, kindly men like Aubrey West are often more popular than they or even their friends suspect. Perhaps his remarkable personal triumph at Madingfield led up to what followed, or perhaps the gleam of romance shining on him from Val's enchanted eyes: for whatever reason, all over the room there was a general rising, and West found himself the only person sitting down. Lady Grantchester, a timid woman, was the first to clink glasses with him, blushing like a school-girl as she did it, and it was not Marqueray nor any man of his own circle, but two or three Cambridgeshire comrades of binding days in camp and trench who led the unexpected cheer.

West found himself on his feet: they were waiting for him to make some sort of reply, but what? West had no idea. He had risen because he was evidently supposed to rise, and, in the last event, because Lady Grantchester had touched his arm. She looked up at him as he stood silent at the table, and saw that he was completely overcome. She liked him none the worse for that; perfect self-possession at such a moment was not to be hoped for, hardly to be desired. "Say something—My dear, say anything," whispered the woman of eight and thirty; "half a dozen words will do."

West rallied. "Thank you for your kindness," his voice crossed the room, low, but penetrating and composed, "you, Lady Grantchester," he bowed slightly to her, "and you, Mr. Yarborough, and all, for your undeserved kindness and for your good wishes. If I'm not elected, as perhaps

I shan't be, still I thank you all, and I hope you will forgive me for having unwillingly brought disappointment on our side."

"Too modest by half!" said the Chief Constable with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders.

"I hate your cocksure men," returned Sir Roger Dane rather curtly. "You wouldn't have got a reply like that from Charles Day."

Robert Vere's lady rose at that moment, and in the confusion of the feminine withdrawal any impression of a chill was soon effaced. Formality broke up at once, and West was the center of the keen, excited talk, full of confidence in the prospect of a sharp but successful fight. Fortunately Marqueray, who was watching over Aubrey out of the tail of a discerning eye, came to his rescue by a proposal of dancing, and the younger men and indeed many of their seniors streamed out into the antechamber, cleared while they were dining. Parquet flooring and the silken harmony of violins playing in the musicians' gallery offered inducement to flying feet. Ten o'clock, eleven—West, waltzing with Lady Grantchester, to whom he was excessively grateful for the tact that had steadied him at a critical moment, thought the hours had never seemed so long. He danced with Val, too, because he had already engaged her to dance with him, but he would have escaped if he could: he could not bear deceiving her, he dared not undeceive her, and after a few commonplaces he scarcely opened his lips.

Midnight: and Vere broke up the revels. By twos and threes the party scattered, some of the men going off on foot: it was a brilliant night of moonlight and an iron frost, garlands of starshine sparkling through the mist of riverside air. Lamps and rolling wheels went away down the long avenue of Herold. Within doors also people

soon dispersed to their rooms, expedited by Lady Grantchester, who was staying the night, and who circulated the hint, which Vere could not well circulate for himself, that their hosts were all dead tired and would be glad to get to bed.

Val Yarborough went to her room like the others. But when she found that Yarborough had not yet come up, she slipped out again as far as the head of the staircase. In the hall below, near the great leaved doors, a knot of men were gathered: her father, Robert Vere, Marqueray, and Aubrey West. She could not hear a word they were saying, but she saw directly that something had gone wrong. She had been very much startled by West's speech at dinner and his manner to herself, and though she had resisted the disagreeable impression, it recurred to her now. She had been taken so closely into her father's confidence that in any political trouble she never thought of herself as a woman at all, and without reflection she ran down to join the group of men. But she saw at once that they were all disconcerted by her coming.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, shall I go?" she said, speaking to Yarborough, but watching West. "Has anything gone wrong about the election?"

"You may as well stay, my dear, as you're here," said Yarborough. "Yes, I should think there was something wrong! This boy is going to lose the seat for us. I could wish, Aubrey, you had arranged your affairs with more discretion—or timed them for a more convenient season."

His manner was as cool and composed as ever, but his accent was cutting, and Val saw, as West did also, that he was in a towering passion. It was hardly to be wondered at considering the position in which he had openly placed both himself and his daughter.

"Gently, gently," said Vere. "It isn't altogether Aubrey's fault."

"What on earth has happened, Aubrey?" said Val—conscious that she ought to go, but determined to stay and stand between West and Yarborough.

"An irruption of Marchmont," said West briefly. "He threatens to bring a divorce action against his wife, naming me as the other man in the case, unless Lady Marchmont returns to him."

"Oh, good heavens! will it be known before Saturday?"

"Oh yes, he'll see to that. Notices in all the local Opposition papers to-morrow evening. Nobody can stop him: it isn't libelous to draw attention to an impending suit."

"But I don't understand," said Val, turning whiter than West, as the personal bearing of West's news forced itself on her: "it's not—not possible—that—that he believes——?"

"Aubrey," said Yarborough, "is rather young, my dear, to be the protector of another man's wife."

"We have Aubrey's word for his innocence," said Vere, brushing away a smile with his hand. He was incapable of taking such a charge seriously. In his day and set the question of Aubrey's innocence would have been left in a decent obscurity, and certainly Vere would not have expected Val, if he had stood in West's relation to Val, to make a fuss about it. What woman thinks the worse of a man for a wild oat or so? Still, it should have been got over and got out of the way before the Yarborough affair came on. "It's well to be off with the old love——!" But perhaps West had really been hurried along with Val faster and farther than he meant to go? Vere suspected that Yarborough's anger, which he underrated, was partly due to an irritable consciousness of his having to some extent forced West's hand. "We have Aubrey's word," said Vere, "and personally I accept it." West smiled: he knew very well that Vere did not accept it, did not care a straw whether he were innocent or no, but inclined on general principles to presume him guilty. "But in any

case, even supposing, for the sake of argument, that Marchmont had a grain or two of justification, there can't be any room for doubt that Aubrey no longer—h'm"—very awkward discussing these things before a woman, and especially before an interested woman!—"in short, I certainly think the safest solution for all parties is the obvious one. If Marchmont wants to take his wife back, let him! She'll be a great deal better off than she is now, earning her living—how did you say, Aubrey? As a nursery governess? Poor thing! There isn't much room for doubt that she'll be better off in Grosvenor Square."

"Ha, that's a good idea!" said Yarborough with his Lucifer look. "You agree, of course?" He laid his hand heavily on West's shoulder. He was giving West a chance to clear himself: if West was not Phyllida's lover, naturally he would agree. Perfectly understanding him, West shook his head.

"No, I don't agree, sir. In fact I sent off a wire before dinner to Stennis telling him on no account to let Lady Marchmont hear what's in the wind. I only hope I was in time." He raised his eyes to Marqueray's impassive face. "I would sooner lose the election—I'd sooner cut off my right hand than save myself by sacrificing Phyllida."

"Folly, Aubrey," said Vere very sharply. He dared not look at Val. "Persuade him, Dan." But Marqueray's only answer was to step between West and Yarborough. Vere gave a jerk of his great shoulders. Might not one have foreseen that the younger generation would hang together? "But it is pure folly and worse," he said in a hot, challenging tone. "What right have you to be so sure that Lady Marchmont would rather be dragged through the courts than go back to her husband?"

"Go back to Lord Marchmont? Oh no," said Val. "That would never do."

Vere bent his astonished brows on her. "What's that, Miss Val? Why not?"

"You don't know her story. I do: I've known it almost from the first." Val drew herself erect, fine-drawn and ivory-white under her wreath of emeralds. This was her hour, a touchstone of the hardest qualities of character—magnanimity, courage, rapid thought, and ready wit. The conclusion to which she had come was that she had entirely mistaken West: but through her own vanity and not his fault: and she faced the men with the same sort of smile with which her father got on his legs when a Government amendment was going to be lost and three-quarters of the House were roaring "'Vide! 'Vide!" But Val had to face a distressed, sympathetic courtesy which was worse than a Labor storm. "She's a mere child of nineteen, very pretty, very gentle, and as innocent as any little Irish nun. Oh, I must speak plainly! Men never believe in men, I know, in a thing of this kind, but you're wrong, Mr. Vere, and you, Chief. I'm not concerned to defend Aubrey, he can answer for himself, but let a woman answer for a woman. Phyllida is guileless."

"Played!" said Vere under his breath.

"But what on earth are you talking about, Val?" said her father: "you've known of it before, have you?"

"Oh, almost from the first! Aubrey came to me to help him, naturally, as the woman he knows best in town and one of his oldest friends: he told me about his rescuing Phyllida, and how he had had to take her home with him because there was absolutely nowhere else for her to go. He brought her to see me in Park Lane." Val could read her father's mind, and Vere's: she knew they were both reaching rapidly the same conclusion, that though West might well have made love to Phyllida, and though when cornered he would inevitably lie about it, he would not in those circumstances have introduced Phyllida to Val. That was outside their code and his. If he had done that, he was, improbable as it seemed, innocent. "It was I," said Val, "who found this post for Phyllida. Mrs. Drew is a

great friend of mine, and I was Phyllida's guarantor." She turned to the other aspect of the case and dealt as sharply with that. "I don't know, Aubrey would naturally never tell me, whether he is fond of her. She's very charming, and he must have been very sorry for her, and he had no other tie." West gave a violent start, but repressed himself: the time was not exactly propitious for demanding a personal explanation. "But that's no business of mine," said Val. *Or of yours*, her tone implied. "I don't defend Aubrey; I defend Phyllida. If the election can only be won by forcing her back to her husband, it must be lost, that's all. You all know what sort of man Lord Marchmont is, probably much better than I do, but within my limited knowledge I shouldn't think it possible for any man to behave more brutally to any woman than he did to Phyllida. Are we to put the whip into his hand again? She shan't go; shall she, Mr. Marqueray?"

Marqueray, smiling, shook his head.

"Agreed," said West. "Difficult as things are, on no account and under no conditions shall she be sacrificed."

Vere shrugged his shoulders. "Then, my dear Aubrey, you may as well withdraw your candidature. For if this gets out, you most certainly won't get in."

"And if I have anything to do with it, you won't get in anywhere else," said Yarborough with a bitter civility. "I do not care twopence, Aubrey, what your relations with the lady may have been." This was false: it was the personal affront that stung, and went on stinging: he was furious with West for the slap administered to Val. "But I say there are obligations to the party which ought to stand first and foremost. However charming and immaculate Lady Marchmont may be, her place is with her husband and not cutting capers in a divorcee court. And however excellent your own intentions, no affection for other men's wives, however Platonic, ought to stand before your pledge to your own side. If you think Hope will enjoy

being made to look ridiculous, I don't. I do not enjoy it myself. This is a time when every vote counts. If you must make a fool of yourself, I wish you wouldn't do it at the expense of a safe Government seat. John Deever would have got in at the same or less cost of time and trouble. I'm afraid you're too Quixotic for political life."

"There's nothing Quixotic in it, sir," said West. "It's a case of simple honesty, and, though I very much regret the disappointment to the party and my own apparent ingratitude, there's no other course open for me to adopt. I shall simply have to take my licking as philosophically as I can. Or would you like me to withdraw in favor of John Deever? If it could be done, I, of course, should be only too willing. It's short notice. But Deever is well known in the neighborhood."

"Rubbish! Send the girl back to her husband," said Vere. "Any sort of husband is better for a woman than the divorce court."

"Send her to her grave," said Val. "She's a very humble, grateful child, and if you tell her it's her duty to go, she'll go. But it would kill her."

"Keep out of it, my dear," said Yarborough carelessly. "Aubrey can't shelter behind your petticoats."

"There's one thing you forget, Mr. Yarborough."

In the impasse, when all tempers were roughening, Marqueray broke in at last with his soft voice and strong personality. His silence throughout had been sufficiently marked to get him an instant hearing. "After all, Aubrey's virtue is not relevant. I know all the facts, and I can assure you it's a trumped-up case, and March won't win it. He has next to no evidence. But that's no good to us, because it can't be won before Saturday. When I was in France, we used to be taught that the only sound method of defense was attack. Can't we carry the war into the enemy's country?" He sought and held Yarbor-

ough's eye. "March is trying to put the screw on us. Have we no means of putting the screw on him?"

"That's an idea, certainly," said Yarborough.

"But have we weapons enough?" said Vere.

"I have," said Marqueray laconically.

"Not you, Dan!" West exclaimed.

"And why not I, Aubrey?"

He met West's dismay with his steady, contemptuous smile. "I, and no one else. If Mr. Yarborough will give me the full powers that he offered me this afternoon, I shall be much surprised if I can't make March hear reason. I'm not concerned in this unfortunate, idiotic affair, and my name isn't linked with Lady Marchmont's. We have still twelve hours, and I can be in London before dawn."

"Bravo!" cried Val. "That's the way to tackle a man like Lord Marchmont. Don't let any grass grow under your feet! He won't." She mastered the last rebellion in her blood. "And if there's any hitch or danger, go direct to Harlesden and bring Phyllida to me. Law or no law, once under my wing he shan't touch her."

To her surprise she found her hand taken into Marqueray's clasp.

"Eternal law-breaker!" he murmured with a smile in which certain smouldering animosities flickered out forever. "That is a promise. Mind, I trust you."

"Not so fast," said Yarborough. "When I offered you the job this afternoon, you refused it."

"Circumstances alter cases. The F.O. hadn't been so civil to me that I felt inclined to pull any more chestnuts out of the fire for it. But I'll do for West what I wouldn't do for the F.O. Now, it would be rather difficult for you, sir, in your official position to walk into March. But I'm a freelance, and what I do signifies to no one but myself."

"It involves hushing up facts that ought to be known,"

said Yarborough. "I'm not sure that I'm justified in defending private interests——"

"But West's candidature is a public interest." Marqueray quoted, smiling. "'This is a time when every vote counts.'"

"Oh, if you've any way of drawing Marchmont's fangs, for Heaven's sake draw them!" said Vere impatiently. "Draw them first, Riseley, and debate on ethics afterwards. Myself, I'm not sure the best thing wouldn't be to go and tell him that if he doesn't drop it he'll be soundly horse-whipped. It's not half what he deserves for such a bit of blackmail—because that's what it amounts to, blackmailing his wretched wife into returning to him, God help her if she did—and it would probably be the most effective line we could take. He's an arrant coward. But I suppose—worse luck!—in these effeminate days it can't be done. Unless you, Dan, would care to combine it with the diplomatic side of your mission?"

"I should like it very much," said Marqueray; "you can't think how I should enjoy it. But, no, it can't be done. I cannot touch him. No one can touch him. Well, sir, have I your leave to go?"

"Full," said Yarborough without further indecision. "You know what to say?"

"Perfectly," replied Marqueray. "I'll slip up to my room now and change. Can't very well appear in town at four of the morning in swallowtails. Aubrey, do you mind digging up one of my men and telling him to get a car out? The Raymond-Ray."

"I hate your going, Dan," said West with repressed, passionate vehemence.

"Oh, don't say that," returned Marqueray, invisibly amused. "Think it over: haven't I, as things have fallen out, the right to go?"

CHAPTER XXIII

Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and, no sooner had,
Past reason hated.

BUT they were all reckoning without their host—all except West, who knew Gaythorne Stennis well enough to feel uneasy. Stennis was the West's family solicitor, and, belonging to the elder generation, behaved to Aubrey much like Aubrey's father. West went to him because he was old and honest and respectable, and Stennis took his instructions without suspicion because neither the tale nor the natural, open telling gave him anything whatever to suspect. But in Grosvenor Square Stennis learned some fresh and ugly details, which Macbain was called in to confirm. Like most lawyers, Stennis had a rooted distrust of Quixotic men, and he felt peevish when he recalled West's candid eyes. After listening to Marchmont, he was no longer prepared to stake a suit on their candor. He reached, though by a different path, exactly the same goal as Robert Vere. Whatever had happened between young West and Lady Marchmont, there was no doubt that Lord Marchmont could make out a damaging *prima facie* case, and even if West's (hypothetical) innocence was proven in the end, there would be a resounding scandal and a check to his career. How very painful this would be to Colonel Wynn-West! Gaythorne Stennis thought more of his old friend the Colonel, and the Colonel's family, than of his individual client. There were no two ways about it. The scandal must be burked. Lady Marchmont must be coaxed or bullied into going home. What other dénoue-

ment would prove so satisfactory all round, so decent, so moral, so obliging? Any husband is better for a woman than the divorce court.

And to this effect, though under much tissue paper, Stennis wrote to West after leaving Marchmont's house; but this was not enough. It was now four o'clock on Thursday afternoon; West would not get his letter till Friday morning; Marchmont was giving them only twelve hours' grace. Even if West came tearing up to town on the last day of his election fight,—a very ill-advised proceeding,—the 8:30 to King's Cross would leave him barely two hours before noon. The telephone? Ten to one West was out, or if he was in, how can one cross-examine a client on a telephone? Stennis therefore concluded by begging West not to worry, because he was going direct to Harlesden, and in all human likelihood Lady Marchmont would be only too thankful to accept her husband's terms.

Stennis did not say to himself that Phyllida would be more tractable if West were not there. Far from it! Nothing short of painful necessity would have induced him to go behind a client, but he could not wait for West.

And so he drove away, not without an irritable sense of loss of dignity, to Harlesden Vicarage, where he asked Mrs. Drew's leave to have a second interview with her governess. Joanna Drew did not laugh because she never laughed, but she was amused, and she remarked to St. John Drew afterwards that her next governess was going to be fat and fifty and destitute of any past. However, she was feeling very sorry for Phyllida, and sent her down without delay from a nursery tea to the bare, roomy, comfortable drawing-room with its few but good etchings and its pots of violets and mignonette. When Gaythorne Stennis met Phyllida, flushed from a warm fire, a bunch of violets tucked into the ribbon of the inevitable gray dress, he got so far as to congratulate himself on having been obliged to go behind his client. Young men commit strange

follies, and who could tell whither West might have been driven between Marchmont's threat and Phyllida's eyes? A private intrigue was bad enough, but a romantic elopement and "the world well lost"—no, no!

Very fatherly in manner, Stennis sat holding hat and gloves between his knees while as delicately as possible he explained to Phyllida the step taken by Lord Marchmont and the double threat he was holding out. Stennis expected tears, blushes, agitation: to his surprise Phyllida showed little feeling of any kind. She sat looking very pretty but rather vacant, and turning a ring about on her finger. Once only she winced and shivered, when Stennis told her that Marchmont would withdraw the action only if she returned to Grosvenor Square.

"Ye mean——? Sure he doesn't want me to be his wife again!"

Stennis thought her strangely coarse. "But you are his wife!"

"Oh, no, no!" said Phyllida, rising as if to escape, to fly from an intolerable fear. "I'm not *his* wife any more."

"T'ck! t'ck!" went Stennis under his breath. After that let her plead innocence if she liked! He had no desire to be hampered by a confession, and he too jumped up and laid a repressive touch on her arm. "Lord Marchmont is your husband, and naturally he wants you back as his wife. Any intermediate arrangement would, I feel sure, turn out quite unworkable, even if Lord Marchmont would consent to it, which he wouldn't. Why, what would he think if it were proposed? What would he think of you? What would he think of Mr. West? As a woman of the world, now!" Phyllida opened round eyes—no one had ever called her that before. "You really must be sensible. What can it matter——?"

"O well! no," said Phyllida, sitting down again with a great sigh. "I forgot, it won't matter now."

Stennis breathed freely again. "You see, my dear

young lady," he said, taking her hand in a fatherly way, "your own position will be very much better than if he had merely consented to make you an allowance. The world is censorious, and people are always ready to gossip about a lady who lives separated from her husband, especially when she's young, and, if I may say so, attractive. I dare say just at first you may find it painful to resume your married life. But after all, Lord Marchmont is your husband, and you took him 'for better for worse.' If you were my own daughter, I should give you the same advice." And this was true. "The right course and the safe course is always, in the long run, the happiest course for a woman."

"Yes, that's what men say," replied Phyllida in a subdued tone. "My own Father Ryan's been writing to me to go back. But I don't know whether men understand the way it is for a woman. Ye see, you're not women."

This was true, too, but Stennis shifted his ground. "In any case, that's not all. If Mr. West were here I dare say he'd tell you not to consider him, but I'm sure you wouldn't wish to think only of yourself. You say you're very—er—grateful to Mr. West"—"Ah! very," said Phyllida—"Then here is a plain way to show your gratitude. Perhaps you hardly realize what a blow it would be to him if this disastrous action were brought at the crisis—the very crisis—of his political career. He would not only lose the election, but it would be a millstone round his neck for the rest of his life. Probably Mr. Yarborough would dismiss him. It would be a most dreadful business for him and all his family." The old man added bluntly, "It's not as if he could ever marry you."

It was waste of breath, for Phyllida's determination was already taken. She rose up quietly at the first full stop—it would have been rude to interrupt, and no doubt Mr. Stennis meant well though he was a silly old man—and told him that she would go to Marchmont House as soon

as she had packed and said good-by to Mrs. Drew. Stennis was startled by his easy victory. It made him feel skeptical and nervous. Did she mean to play him false? He had nightmare visions of an agitated Phyllida rushing off to Cambridge by the five o'clock train and flinging herself into West's arms on a public platform. But Lady Marchmont, gentle as her manner was, revealed for once a mild determination largely due to absence of mind. No, Mr. Stennis was not to dream of waiting for her: no, she would not be quick at all, she would have a great deal to say to Mrs. Drew and there were the children to bathe and put to bed. She thanked Mr. Stennis for kindly offering to go with her, but she would rather go alone.

About seven o'clock Lady Marchmont stood on the pavement outside Oxford Circus station, carrying in her hand a bag which contained all her earthly possessions—the clothes West had given her, a book of prayers, a pearl chain sent her by Marqueray during the twelve hours of their betrothal. She had said good-by to Harlesden forever and was on her way to Grosvenor Square.

In St. John Drew's study, his wife was giving him an account of Phyllida's unexpected flight. "Yes, she's gone," Joanna Drew said in her detached, impartial voice. "She has returned to her husband, and I'm very sorry for it. She was the most disturbing person I ever had in my house, but she was trustworthy with the children and a loving little thing. I never followed all the ins and outs, and I don't know Lord Marchmont, but I wish she would have waited to consult Aubrey or Mr. Marqueray. I did all I could to keep her. But I have no authority over her, and after all Lord Marchmont is her husband."

"I wish Marqueray had run off with her," said St. John Drew.

"That is a straw hat and not a biretta wish," remarked Joanna. St. John scratched his head.

"Well, then, I wish Marchmont were dead."

"St. John, I shall report you to your churchwardens."

"You can report me to the bishop if you like," said St. John Drew. "He is such a wretched little scrub."

But he could not pursue Phyllida, who had already reached Oxford Circus. It was a clear, cold evening, the roadway was like a dry floor ringing with frost and festal with many-colored lights, and in the dusk before moonrise great stars were burning overhead. Phyllida hailed a cab. She could not walk like a beggar to her husband's door. But the rhythm and tune and glow of a London night recalled other memories, a despairing, an uncontrollable longing for another hour's freedom surged over her, and instead of Marchmont House she gave the address of Marqueray's flat in Whitehall. He was not there, she knew. He was in Cambridgeshire with West. She had had a letter from him that morning. It was not yet answered. She would answer it while she was still free and before Marchmont's connubial ardors defaced her memory of Marqueray's love.

She went up in the lift in which she had traveled with Marqueray not so very long ago. How everything had changed since then! and Phyllida had changed, too. It is not on record that prisoners blush or feel shy on the rack, and Phyllida met the porter's eye without a qualm, although there was curiosity in it. She rang at the staircase door of Marqueray's flat, and it was opened to her by Banks, in whose eye also glimmered a discreet curiosity: who was this unknown, pretty lady who visited Mr. Marqueray in his rooms?

"I know Mr. Marqueray is not at home," said Phyllida, serene without effort because her mind was far away. "Will ye take me to his sitting-room if ye please? He's coming up to town to-morrow, and I want to leave a note for him." Banks hung in the wind. "I am Lady Marchmont, and I know Mr. Marqueray very well."

Banks had never heard of Lady Marchmont, but he was

a man of swift perceptions, and he fell back with a respectful "This way if you please, my lady," and ushered Phyllida into Marqueray's sitting-room. Except for an unlit hearth and a stiff, military neatness of chair and table, it was exactly as it had been when Phyllida was last in it. She opened a drawer in Marqueray's writing bureau and found a sheet of paper and a pen—Dan's own pen, she remembered having seen it in his fingers when he wrote her out the sham receipt: and where she was sitting he often sat, leaning his arm where Phyllida leaned her arm. She was aware that Banks remained in the room, but Marqueray himself could not have been more indifferent to observation. She had a difficult letter to write, a legal sort of letter like Mr. Stennis would have written; it had to be very logical and stiff and cold.

"MY DARLING DAN,—

"This is a bad pen. This is the last time I shall ever call you my Dan. I had your letter this morning. You say we must part. I am sorry you are going to Russia, it is such a long way off, but I would rather you did whatever makes you happy. You say you will come and see me to-morrow, but I would rather not see you any more. It hurts too, too much. I am going back to my husband. I would not do it if I were still your own, but when you go to Russia it will not signify what becomes of me, will it? You must not think I want to go back to him, because I do not—not at all—but I cannot hurt Mr. West. Oh I do hope you will not mind! I could not bear it if you were unhappy like you were that night in Surrey and me not there. Can I keep your ring or do you want it? I cannot kiss this because your servant is here, but I will always love you and never forget you and pray you may be happy.

"Good-by dear, dearest Dan."

Phyllida slipped this letter into an envelope and shut it up and addressed it in her unformed child's hand to "G. Danvers Marqueray, Esqre.," and left it lying on the bureau "to await arrival." No saving gleam of common sense warned her that it would be read by Banks as soon as her back was turned. Nor did she ask herself what

Banks would think of her when she crossed to the other door and entered and closed it behind her.

Banks shrugged his shoulders. Impossible to interfere. If she stole Mr. Marqueray's toilet silver or his sleeve links, let her: but she was not a thief: she was—at a guess—the lady for whom Mr. Marqueray had ordered tea not long ago, and probably the lady with whom Mr. Marqueray had spent a week end in Surrey. Licking his lips over a jovial memory of his own, Banks could hardly keep his fingers off Phyllida's letter. With any luck, if it was the sort of letter that gentlemen don't care to discuss, Banks looked forward to bleeding Mr. Marqueray: not but what Mr. Marqueray was an ugly customer to bleed; it might be safer to try the lady or a third party: there's always more than one handle to a compromising letter, and this ought to be a spicy one. At all events, if the lady cared to nose round Mr. Marqueray's bedroom, it was not for Banks to shove his oar in. If she did any damage, Mr. Marqueray would only say "You're a fool, Banks," whereas if he meddled with one of Mr. Marqueray's women, he would probably be kicked. Banks left Phyllida to her own devices.

And what were Phyllida's mad little devices? Only to print off on her memory a picture of the room where Marqueray slept, so as to be able to see him with her mind's eye when she said her prayers for him at night; only to slip her own rosary into the middle of his clean handkerchiefs, where Banks found it a day or so later, when he was wishing with all his heart—since he was only a sharp, sly, thieving Londoner and not a callous villain—that he had never touched his master's blessed letter. Indeed the room, though large, was bare, and contained so few personal possessions that Phyllida found it unsatisfying. (She didn't like to think of Dan sleeping on a bare camp bedstead or standing barefoot on a cold wooden floor.) But she discovered some of Marqueray's old coats hanging

in a wardrobe, and she took one down and slipped her arms into it, and sniffed the faint aromatic scent of his Russian cigars, and pretended to herself that it was still warm from his wearing; and then, having commended its absent owner to the care of all the Saints, she came out again looking a little more serene. She had forgotten all about Banks till she saw him waiting for her, when instinct or a vague recollection of Marchmont's habit prompted her to put her last half sovereign into his hand. Banks pocketed it philosophically, and was more than ever glad that he had let her alone.

In this visit to Marqueray's rooms, so desperately incautious, Phyllida acted with the humble innocence of a child. She never dreamed of danger, for who would mind what she did, a little thing like her? When she came out of Marqueray's porch, a tall, shabby-looking man was talking to her driver. It occurred to her that she had seen that red hair in Harlesden, yet she drew no inference, though as she drove off the loiterer turned in at Marqueray's door. She might have thought more of it at another time, but her small head was dazed—she could apprehend, act, and feel, but not think.

What was she feeling, as the cab all too swiftly carried her to Marchmont House? First of all a fixed determination to return to Marchmont and set West free. There were no two ways about it. Marqueray himself could not have shaken her. What! turn coward, shirk her duty, ruin the man who had saved her from ruin (she had found out from Joanna Drew by discreet probing what Mrs. Carter had expected of her) or from death? Never! not by any act or inaction of hers was West to suffer. Gratitude apart, her love of fair play was strong enough for that. Poor Mr. West, what had he done?

Towards Marqueray she could not get beyond a bitter, aching sense of loss—a sense that something had gone out of her life which could never come back into it. Phyllida

was of a constant nature, and as he from the moment when he was persuaded of her innocence had recognized in her the one woman for him, so she instinctively turned to him as the one man for her. Romance apart, most of us are dimly aware that chance or propinquity has had a good deal to do with the shaping of our destiny, and that some other woman or some other man might in other circumstances have done as well for us as our own kind partner: that we are keys which will fit into more than one lock. But neither Marqueray nor Phyllida was enough like other people to be easily mated. There are locks that will open only to one key. Dan was Phyllida's mate. He might marry another woman, Phyllida told herself in the cab. Men need women more than women need men, and her union with Marchmont had not inspired in her any great faith in man's fidelity. Dan evidently didn't love her the way she loved him. . . . She was incapable of reading behind Marqueray's careful, temperate letter, because it was written out of a suffering which she had never felt and he preferred to conceal. Very likely he would marry another woman. But she was not angry, and she couldn't cease to love him, no, nor ever would, though she was going back to Hamon and would never see Dan again.

But when she neared Grosvenor Square, she left off thinking of West or even of Marqueray, for fear began to fill her mind to the exclusion of every other thought. Phyllida was not one of those who, in Johnson's valiant phrase, "injure life by misrepresentation"; she saw it as it is and took it as it came, living for to-day and not for a to-morrow which might never come; but now the storm was on her; it was only ten minutes, five minutes, two minutes away. West had thought her pathetically frank about her married life, but there was one aspect of it which she had kept dark because one can't speak of these things, no, not to anybody; one can only bear them. "Any husband is better for a woman than the Divorce Court." So

Vere had said to West, and so Gaythorne Stennis had said to Phyllida. Well, she was doing what they wanted: she was giving up her lover, saving her benefactor, and returning to her wifely duty. A union smiled on by Society and blessed by the Church! The cab drew up before Marchmont House, and Phyllida sat still a moment. Suppose she said, "Drive on to the river. Set me down at Chelsea Bridge." Wouldn't that be a swifter and a less painful way out? It is a dark tide, the Thames under a London bridge: but there are deeper, darker tides than the calm flowing Thames.

"I must be brave, like Dan is brave," murmured Phyllida, and she crept out, carrying her basket, and pulled down the heavy iron tassel by the door. It was by now half-past eight, the very time, as it happened, when Marchmont was speaking to West over the telephone. As the Jew wished West good night, Simpson slipped in to announce that a lady had come to see Lord Marchmont. She said, Simpson continued in his cool, half-insolent manner, that she was Lady Marchmont.

"Here? Already?" said Marchmont, stopping short in surprise.

He raised his hand to the receiver again, but on second thoughts let it fall. Time enough to communicate the news to West to-morrow, when he could add savory detail.

He was in the same room in which he had received West, a Georgian room, dark and shapely, but much out of harmony with gilt furniture of the Second Empire, a profusion of brocade and painted satin and Sèvres and ormolu and blue shaded lamps. Marchmont himself had returned late from a motor run, and was wearing the knickerbocker suit of light tweeds which he considered appropriate to the character of a country gentleman; and so they might have been, but not to Marchmont, who was not much like a country gentleman. Nevertheless, when Phyllida came in, his sensitive unstable nature was sobered by the change

in her. How much older she was, and more mature! She had evidently gone through a great deal since they met in Mayo. In the diseased moral organism under Marchmont's fawn-colored tweeds, there were left a few remains of decent, kindly feeling.

He got up. "Well, my dear," he said without any of his usual affectation, "so we meet again? You're looking well." He kissed her lightly on the cheek. "And I'm very pleased to see you."

"Ye sound tired, Hamon," said Phyllida in her soft, natural voice. After all he was her husband. Nothing—mercifully—can ever undo that bond, or destroy such small protection as it brings. What has been, may be again; there is not the same laceration of the nerves as if it were borne for the first time. Dutifully she received Marchmont's kiss. "Haven't ye been so very well?" she said, drawing off her gloves and laying them on the table, which after all was her table, as the house was her house, and the grisly wreck before her was her lord and master. There was nothing whatever dramatic in her return. She had no sense of the theater, and could be guaranteed to reduce the most striking situation to terms of the commonplace.

"Quite well," said Marchmont testily. Phyllida had forgotten that he hated to have his health inquired after. The details of her married life began to return to her, and she remembered that Marchmont had been in the habit of taking digestive pills and that Dr. Statham had cautioned her not to let him take too many. She opened her lips to ask if he had been disobeying medical orders, but on second thoughts deferred inquiry to a more convenient season. Marchmont was always trying to pretend that he was quite well. She looked about her with a speculative eye—"How oddly ye've furnished yourself! This blue light's not so very becoming. It makes you look blue, too, being pale, and if any one was red it would make him look purple."

"Blue, eh? Come and sit down and let us have a comfortable chat." He put her into a chair. "Tell me anything you don't like, and we'll have it altered. But your æsthetic prejudices are a novelty to me—has West been coaching you?"

"No, oh no, he never bothers about things like that. I expect he hasn't much taste himself. His house is too comfortable," replied Phyllida, innocent of satire. "'Tis all cozy and ordinary, with coke fires, and chairs ye can sit in, and nice dark carpets that don't show the dirt: poor Mr. West! I do hope he'll get in for South Cambs. Ye were too bad to threaten to go to law with him. Mr. Stennis says he never would have got in if ye had, and it'll make so much difference to him, the getting in this time."

"So you've immolated yourself? It was sensible of you to come off at once without making any fuss. But won't West be a little annoyed?"

"I don't know,"—she was smoothing out her gloves and economically blowing into the fingers of them to preserve their shape. "He won't hear till to-morrow. But why would he be?"

Marchmont examined her attentively in a sudden surprise. Good heavens! was it possible——? Any other man would have felt relief, but Marchmont was merely irritated. Had she brought back to him nothing but the old, inveterate, insipid innocence after all? And had he missed his revenge on West? But when he remembered West's voice over the telephone,—that last cry of unconcealed agony,—he felt soothed. West was her lover: and if he was her lover, however much milk and water there was in West's composition, surely she was his. But what a simpleton!

"Phyllida," he smiled, "if you're good you shall telephone West to-morrow and tell him you came back to me to-night."

Phyllida, not following this remark, let it alone. She

was already tired of talking to Marchmont: it was not the least of her wifely trials that he made her feel stiff and shy, and she never could think of anything to say to him. "What time d'ye have dinner now? I haven't any dress to change, but I'd like to take me hat off and smooth me hair."

"Are you hungry?"

"A little. I had a bun and a cup of tea at an A.B.C. shop, but that's a long while ago."

It must be confessed that Lady Marchmont had not the temperament of a heroine. It never would have occurred to her that in a tragic hour one ought not to want anything to eat.

"Phyllida," said Marchmont, "was West your lover?"

It was significant of her terrible familiarity with insult that she was not indignant nor even surprised. "Oh no, never, Hamon. He wants to marry some one else."

"I don't believe you," said Marchmont angrily. But he did: he saw that she was speaking the truth. "If not, why didn't he want you to come back to me?" He locked his arm round her waist and pulled her down on his knee, Phyllida resigning herself passively to the constricting coil into which the organized forces of society were delivering her. She could not tear herself out of Marchmont's arms as out of Marqueray's, nor could she tell Marchmont that she would die if he held her—nor would Marchmont care if she did. His clemency had exhausted itself, and the glow that Phyllida feared more than violence was beginning to shine in his eyes. "I rang West up ten minutes ago, and he implored me not to drag you back. If he wasn't your lover, why was that? Whom have you been living with if it isn't Aubrey? I'll swear you never paid for these clothes yourself—hallo! Hallo! What's this?"

He held up her hand. She had actually gone to Grosvenor Square still wearing Marqueray's ring—a man's heavy seal ring, many sizes too large for her, and bound

with black silk to keep it on. Why not? It hadn't any name on!

" 'Tis a ring,"—Phyllida locked her small fingers over her palm,—“and thank you, Hamon, I don't want it taken off.”

He took it off. “‘*Aequanimiter in arduis.*’ That isn't West's motto. Whose the devil is it? Eh? Have you any more jewelry about you? Locketts round your pretty neck, eh?” He satisfied himself on this point. “Not even a miniature for you to wear next your heart? Nothing but a secondhand ring? Stingy brute! Upon my soul you don't seem to have done as well for yourself as such a pretty girl has a right to expect! What are you getting so red about? Don't be shy, you little duffer, you needn't mind telling me; do you suppose I care how many lovers you've had? Not I! But, shy or not, you've got to tell me who it was; I'll get that out of you before I've done with you. Eh? Not going to tell me? Oh yes, you are; you needn't be under any delusion about that; you're going to tell me everything before I'm done with you . . . Stop it, now! What's the matter with you?”

Phyllida had begun to weep bitterly. She was tired, she wanted her ring back, and the insurgent yearning to be held to a gentler heart than Marchmont's had grown too bitter to be borne. She was a wicked girl, she was, but her own Father Ryan couldn't make her believe that Marchmont's touch was hallowed, or Marqueray's profane. “Oh, do let me go!” she sobbed. “Ye have hurt me, ye have. Oh, I do want me ring back——!”

Some one tapped at the door. “Don't come in,” said Marchmont. He threw an impatient glance at his wife—he hated tears: if Phyllida had done it on purpose she could not have been better inspired—and went out. Simpson was in the corridor. “Mr. Macbain wants to see you, my lord. He says it's urgent.”

“Macbain? Ah!” said Marchmont thoughtfully.

Why lose time hammering at an open gate? He left the room, locking the door behind him.

When he returned twenty minutes later, Phyllida had dried her eyes and chidden herself roundly for her foolishness. Mightn't she have known it was silly to wear Dan's ring? Wouldn't a woman of the world have left it for him in his rooms? Now she would have to wait her chance to steal it from Marchmont and post it to Dan. And as for crying, that was no way to begin when there was nothing to cry about! if she began crying now, where would she end?

"Feeling better?" said Marchmont. He was deeply flushed and his pupils were contracted to pin-points. "That's a good girl. Now come along to your room and wash your face and tidy your hair. Here's your ring. I wouldn't deprive you of it for the world." He put it on for her. "'*Aequanimitas in arduis.*' No end of a good motto that—let's hope the owner will live up to it."

Phyllida's heart began to beat uncomfortably fast. Really, there was no counting on Hamon. Why had he given it back to her?—Used as she was to his whims, she did not like this one, and she could not feel as if it were Dan's ring at all after Marchmont had put it on for her. But she followed him upstairs to the room prepared for her, a bower overflowing with white and pink orchids, costliest of flowers, and to Phyllida not flowers at all. They startled her, grimacing at her from every nook like so many fairy dragons with their yawning throats and spotted tongues.

Marchmont poured out water for her. "Is that all the luggage you brought? Or did you leave your clothes behind in the flat? Never mind, I'll get you some more to-morrow. I don't much like that thing you have on. Here's a brush and comb. To-morrow you shall have a maid, but you won't mind putting up with me to-night, will you? I'd better begin by unpacking your basket."

"No, thank you, I'd rather unpack for meself," said Phyllida, hastily seizing it. Marchmont took it from her and slit the padlocked strap with his pocket knife. Phyllida could have wept again to watch him handling all her small personal possessions, her shoes and stockings, her sponges and hairpins, and the box containing one of Thady's curls. Marchmont turned them all out and then began putting them back again. Presently he came on a morocco case lettered "Manton" from the famous shop in Bond Street. He opened it and held up a very beautiful chain of pearls. "Hallo! That's better. So you did get something out of him, after all? Put them on." He fastened them round her throat. Phyllida tried to pull them off, but Marchmont prevented her. He stood in front of her holding her throat lightly between his hands. "Keep them on. They're too valuable to be left knocking about. The only safe plan is to wear them day and night."

"I'm frightened," said Phyllida under her breath.

"What, of me? Oh, nonsense! Why should you be frightened of your husband? Upon my soul you've grown better-looking, Phyllida: you're fatter than you were. Not that you were ever scraggy. You always were a pretty little thing." His fingers tightened on her throat. "But you weren't always so round and soft and dimpled—Now then, what's the matter now?"

The chain had broken, scattering Marqueray's pearls across the floor.

"I'll send one of the servants to pick them up. We'll go down to dinner now," said Marchmont carelessly. Phyllida was silent, her hand at her throat. "Don't you feel as though you could peck a bit? You said you were hungry. You won't be so nervous when you've got a good dinner inside you. You'll feel up to anything after that."

"Up to what?"

He lifted a curtain and glanced out into the autumnal

square, half dark, half moonlit, and gemmed by carriage lamps. "Up to a journey. A second honeymoon."

"A journey? Where to?"

"Only down to Hamon House. You'll like a night in Surrey, won't you?" Phyllida gave a little scream. "Now what on earth is there to frighten you in that? I'm afraid your nerves are in a bad way, my dear. Is it a guilty conscience—eh? Most unnecessary, believe me. I shouldn't care if you had had fifty lovers provided I'm the fifty-first. Oh, what a white face! Any one would think I was going to murder you. Come, come, we're not living in the Middle Ages, my dear, when faithless wives were boiled in oil or flung off the battlements——"

"I'm not a faithless wife, 'tis you were a faithless husband," cried Phyllida, indignant, and rallying her courage as she reflected that his echo of a phrase from her letter to Dan could be nothing but an accident. "Ye never were as mad as this before, I declare! What d'ye want to go racing off into Surrey for in the middle of the night? There's going to be a sharp frost, and night air's bad for you: how many times didn't the doctor tell you so? Ye don't want to be laid up with influenza at this end o' the winter! Any one would think ye had drink taken." Marchmont forcibly took her in his arms and whispered a few words in her ear. Phyllida had been energetically trying to free herself, but she desisted, and her face, from deathly pale, became as red as though he had struck her.

"So now you see why we're going down to Hamon House to-night," Marchmont finished cheerfully. "As long as I thought Aubrey was the happy man, I didn't care, because one knows that Aubrey would only ring the bell and go away again. But if it's the other fellow, I decamp. I shouldn't get much satisfaction out of my honeymoon if I didn't know from one minute to the next but what that red-headed friend of yours was going to blunder in on the top of us. No, we'll slip off quietly and leave no address.

—Eh? You don't want to come? That's a pity because you've got to come. Here is Simpson to tell us dinner is served. Take my arm." Phyllida took it. Though she never dramatized her own life or thought of it as tragic, she felt now as if she were living in a nightmare. This night marked a crisis in her relations with Marchmont. Henceforward she was to be the passive agent of his revenge on Marqueray. Dan might or might not be hurt: but the weapon with which Marchmont struck at him would certainly be broken to pieces.

Meanwhile Herbert Statham, moving aside to let them pass him on the stairs, watched his patron out of sight with an anxious eye. He had not gone to Italy with Marchmont and had never seen or heard of Phyllida before: nor had he seen Marchmont standing with his hands on Phyllida's throat: but the trained perceptions of the medical man were all set on edge by Marchmont's manner. As he turned away, he saw Simpson coming out of Marchmont's room.—"Who is that lady?" asked Statham.

"Lady Marchmont," answered Simpson, brief and insolent.

"What have you got there?"

"Pearls."

"*Pearls?*"

"About a thousand pounds' worth of pearls, I should fancy. The gov'nor told me to pick them up. They're all over the floor. I suppose her ladyship broke her string."

"What's wrong with you, Simpson?"

"Nothing," said Simpson. He dropped the pearls into his handkerchief. "Rolling about on the floor, they were. No offense meant, Mr. Statham, but I'll mind my business, and if I were you I'd mind yours."

CHAPTER XXIV

I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.

IT was not yet a quarter to one when Marqueray came downstairs ready to leave Herold. The hall was deserted, its wide-leaved doors were ajar, and across the scent of roses a breath of night air wandered in cold with a sting of frost. Marqueray strolled out and stood drawing on his heavy gauntlets at the head of the broad and shallow flight of steps. He wore the famous blue serge suit which Phyllida admired, and which gave him some aspect of a sailor: a peaked cap pulled low over his forehead, and no overcoat. Outside in the shadow of Herold stood a long and low racing car, and one of his own men was busy about the petrol tank. West, tired and grave in his evening dress, was looking on with his hands in his pockets. Overhead all the lamps of heaven burned in the splendor of early winter, while the road, white under milky moonlight, stretched away between the chestnuts and faded fields of the park.

West turned as Marqueray came out, and joined his cousin on the top step.

"Dan, I hate your going."

"Oh, don't say that," returned Marqueray, fastening the buckle of his glove. "You only say it because you don't trust me not to lose my temper. Remember, I'm not going as Dan Marqueray; I'm only Yarborough's envoy, and it's not my own case I have to handle, it's Lady Marchmont's. I can keep my temper when I like, and this is emphatically one of the occasions when I do like."

"You don't know what a poisonous tongue Marchmont has."

"Are you afraid of my killing him? I can't think you would waste so many tears on the prospect of my thrashing him." Marqueray regarded his cousin with a quizzical eye. "I am not armed, Aubrey. I had some thoughts of taking a revolver with me, but I recollected my promise to Vere and chucked it back into the drawer."

"If you thrashed him you would kill him."

"Then I should set Phyllida free, but I could never go to her with his blood on my hands.—I'm not going to do anything of the sort. I've expended a vast amount of energy on threatening him behind his back, but the ignominious truth is that I daren't touch him. I'm simply going to tell him that if he doesn't chuck it all up we shall make England too hot to hold him."

"Are you going to him now? He'll be in bed."

"He's a night bird, and I agree with Miss Val that we had better let no grass grow. To whom I hope, by-the-bye, that you will propose to-night or to-morrow morning."

"Are you mad, Dan?"

"No. Nor are you. But you're as blind as a bat and exceedingly silly."

He descended the steps and took his place at the wheel.

"All serene, Winship? I shall want to touch seventy or eighty to-night."

Winship gave the Raymond-Ray a loving pat. "She won't fail you, sir."

Marqueray signed to him to fall back. "What a long face! Still nervous, Aubrey?"

"Very," said West briefly. "I wish I were coming with you.—Shall I come?"

"Good heavens, no!" Marqueray laughed. "Stay and fight it out up here. I shan't be happy unless I rescue Lady Marchmont and you get in for South Cambs. Both barrels, if you love me!"

It was impossible to resist the infection of his merry courage, and West smiled, holding out his hand. "All right, I'll believe that you'll come back in a few hours crowned with laurel victory. Good-by, old man, God bless you."

"I don't know that I've ever had that said to me before," said Marqueray.—"Stand clear, I'm off. Good night."

He shot away, waving his hand at the bend of the road. Long, long West stood following the car with his eyes, till its red rear lamps faded into specks no bigger than the suns overhead, till beyond the lodge gates they were buried in shadow of half stripped wintry woods, till the clear landscape was bare of life and the last throb of Marqueray's flying cylinders and the last wail of his horn had been swallowed up in the hushed breathing of the moonlit plain under its arch of night.

While West went to get the car out, Marqueray to change his clothes, and Vere to brood over the wreck of West's fortunes, Val returned to her room. She was not much surprised when her father followed her. Riseley Yarborough treated his daughter much as he would have treated a favorite son and with a characteristic disregard of conventional reticences, and as a rule Val enjoyed the freedom of their intercourse, but to-night she would have preferred to be left alone. Yarborough, however, strolled in before she could close her door.

"This is a silly business about Aubrey and this girl. I thought he had more sense."

"Men in love," Val pointed out, "don't always behave as sensibly as their friends expect them to."

"Is he in love with her, then? I thought he was making up to you, Val."

"So did I, dear. It would be idle to pretend that I didn't. But I want you to face facts, because we must be

fair to Aubrey. He never has asked me to marry him. He never said or even definitely implied that he cared for me."

"He made you think he did."

"I did think so, but I can't say he made me. You thought so, didn't you? but I suppose we were both of us misled in the same way. Aubrey is naturally friendly and sociable and quick to get fond of people, and we've been thrown together all these years since I came home from France. It seemed the natural thing for him to want to marry me. Like the curate's marrying the vicar's daughter. But you must remember that—that he never has said anything to me. I haven't the smallest right to complain."

"What about this evening?"

"It was only for five minutes, because there wasn't another peaceable spot in the house; and it was my fault, not his. I dragged him in, and he was exceedingly fidgety and uncomfortable, poor boy. I really don't think that ought to count against him! Indeed, it doesn't count for anything at all," Val continued with her faint satirical smile. "Don't let us make a conventional fuss about that! I shouldn't have turned a hair if it had been Lady Grantchester who came in instead of you. Girls of my age and standing aren't afraid of being compromised."

She stood by her dressing-table unfastening the jewels from her dress, a slender, tranquil, dignified figure, and not to be pulled down from her secure pride by any humiliation which West could inflict. Yarborough remained merciless, as usual. To some extent he was deceived by her courage because he was out of sympathy with her distress.

"But you like the boy, do you, Val?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"And I'd have sworn he cared for you. He did mean to marry you. It wasn't only you and I who thought so.

Every one thought it—Vere, who ought to know him if any one does, and that queer fish Marqueray. They must have had it from him."

"From circumstances," suggested Val, beginning to take the pins out of her hair. "Propinquity. . . . And, of course, I should have been a very good match. Aubrey is ambitious, and it would have been a score for him to be your son-in-law. Mr. Vere perhaps wouldn't realize that for a proud man facts like that cut both ways. If you want to know the truth, I believe myself that Aubrey would have liked to marry me, but hung fire because I had too much money, and afterwards his calculations were upset by meeting Phyllida. She's very, very pretty, and she's one of those sweet things that men always want to look after. Probably he was swept off his feet. But what you must realize is that he had a perfect right to withdraw. I jumped to conclusions, and so I am—left. It's a very unpleasant position, but we shan't make it any better by sulking over it. Do not, for example, tell Aubrey that you shall get a new secretary. People really will laugh if you do that. You hit me when you hit Aubrey, because every one will know why you're angry with him."

Yarborough eyed her keenly. "I don't see how he can go on coming to the house every day and meeting you."

"Leave me alone for that. I promise I won't cry into my soup."

"You're sheltering him, you know, that's what you're doing. You don't want me to sack him because you're sorry for him. You want me to help him to keep his head above water. You're a silly girl."

"Naturally. . . . Between South Cambs and Mr. Vere's fury and the fuss the Whips will make he will be sufficiently scourged as it is. Poor Aubrey!" Her eyes were open and whimsical. "I wish for his own sake he were going to marry me. He'd be a great deal better off if he did."

"Have I got to be civil to him, then," said Yarborough, disgusted, "young jackanapes! when I should like to kick him?"

"Unless you want to make me more conspicuously ridiculous," Val answered, "than I am already."

He kissed her cheek. "You're your father's daughter. It shall be as you wish. Good night, my darling."

Under Victorian rules it would not have been possible for Miss Yarborough to go on meeting West for so long and in such close intimacy without some defining of the bond between them. Their intercourse had been founded on the assumption that men and women are equal within the limits of friendship, and so they are, but the penalty of indiscretion for a woman is far heavier than for a man, because, though manners change, the man retains his prerogative of choice, while the woman has only the prerogative of refusal. Val had truly said that she felt none of the Victorian fear of being compromised. No such danger existed for her. But she had given her love where it was not wanted, and no pride, no courage, no cloak of humor or good humor came between her shoulders and the rod of that humiliation. Every one at Herold knew that she was only waiting for West to drop the handkerchief. If or when the news got abroad,—she dared not pin much faith to Marqueray's embassy,—she would be the object of universal pity, a prospect far from soothing to Riseley Yarborough's daughter. And worse,—Oh! far worse!—she did not know how to bear herself when she remembered her last interview with West. She could not recollect exactly what she had said to him or he to her,—one never can,—but if he had not seen then that she loved him, and thought he loved her, doubtless he saw it now!

She was still standing by her dressing-table, inly withdrawn, her mind impaled on its own wretchedness like a moth fluttering on a pin, when there came a subdued tap on her door. "Who is it?" said Val.

"I—Aubrey. Can you come out and speak to me for five minutes?"

Val lifted up her hands and let them fall again. A perfect fury of exasperation seized her, and with it a craving for those safeguards of Victorian etiquette which would have kept the most innocent, the best-intentioned of men from this last blunder.

"Dear Aubrey, it's nearly one o'clock. Can't you wait till to-morrow?"

"I can, but I'd rather not. It's only ten to one. Marquerry has this minute gone, I've just seen him off."

Val did not a second time ask West into her room. She came out to him instead, into a paneled corridor down which a wide oriel at the far end threw a stained gleam of moonlight. "But what do you want? Surely we've said all there is to say for the present!"

"I haven't said anything yet!" said West piteously. "On a point of personal explanation, come and sit in the oriel—do!—for five minutes?"

It was unfair and absurd, Val felt, but she gave in to him for the old reason that in all ages has led women astray—because she loved him. Yes! however much he loved Phyllida, she loved him: her love had been born in uncertainty and nursed in mortification, and was a tough plant that defied storm or frost. Sitting down on the shallow window-seat and leaning her bare shoulders against its painted panes, through which the park, the river meadows, the chalk range behind Barrington, and a low loop of the Cam could be dimly made out in an elfland coloring of purple and blue, she looked up at his well-formed, nervous figure and the kind eyes under his deep forehead with a tenderness which forgave as mothers forgive. How often it happens that men of affairs behave like babies in their private life! How can one expect a politician with his head full of Blue Books to see what is going on under his own nose?

"Now tell me then, or ask—I expect you want to ask me something, don't you?" She schooled her voice to composure without a shade of bitterness. "Is it about Phyllida?"

"No, of course not," said West indignantly. "What I want to know is what on earth you meant by what you said downstairs." Val was speechless. Actually he was angry with her again!—He was, though it would have been hard to say why, and even harder to say what Marqueray would have said if he could have overheard West's way of taking his advice. "After what I told you to-night," West went on in the voice of a man thoroughly ill used, "I can't imagine how you could even pretend to misunderstand me!"

Val drew a long breath. She felt like a martyr who finds at the first turn of the screw that he has presumed too far on his courage. She began to wonder whether she could carry through this interview without a collapse into mere inarticulate tears and writhings.

"Anyhow I understand you now," she said mildly, "so what does it signify to you or to any one what I thought before? It's to-morrow that counts, not yesterday. I'll do anything I can to help you, but indeed, my dear boy, you've got yourself into a very difficult position."

"I know it," said West. "I'm ruined either way, whatever happens. It is hard. Oh heavens, it is hard! But it can't be helped. Thanks to my own infantile indiscretion, Marchmont has us in a cleft stick. Yet on my life I don't see how I could have acted differently. What could I have done with Phyllida but what I did do?"

"Being what you are, I don't see, either, how you could have done differently."

"Nor can I now. 'Send her back to her husband'! And that's your father's advice and Mr. Vere's, men of the world who know what Marchmont is. No, it's up to me to take my licking philosophically." He gave a short, infuriated laugh. "But I don't like it. It does seem hard,

when one has worked and waited as I have, to lose everything in one night through the spite of a little worm like Marchmont. Still, there's no help for it. If it lies between Phyllida and me, it's I that must go to the wall. You do see that, don't you?"

"Oh, perfectly," said Val, feeling for her handkerchief.

"So I must go," said West. "If Dan can stave off this abominable divorce suit, I may be able to keep my footing in public life. But I don't believe he will; and in any case your father will sack me. Taking the view he takes, he won't care to have me coming and going on the old friendly terms. Oh, I don't blame him! He's always been most awfully good to me, and after what he said to me to-night it's only natural for him to resent my getting mixed up in this sort of mess. It wouldn't even be so bad if he hadn't made that unlucky speech at dinner, because every one must have known what he was driving at. However, he meant it in all kindness——"

Either he was more grossly stupid than even a politician has any right to be, or they were at cross-purposes. "But, Aubrey——"

"But what I will not stand," West bore her down; one foot on the low sill beside her, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders thrown back to their old drilled set, his voice recklessly raised above a prudent midnight level, he let himself go, the restraint of six years slipping from him like a cloak: "is your chucking me over, Val, as you did downstairs. I don't care a rap about the others. What do they know? But you know. So don't pretend you don't. Hang it, I'm not a footman to be turned off with a month's wages instead of notice——!"

He stopped because Val had put up her handkerchief to her eyes. "Oh, good heavens!" He had never imagined Val in tears. "Oh, Val, don't cry——!"

She got up. "Don't do that." He tried to put his arm round her. "Aubrey, please tell me this before you

say any more—which of us is it you do want to marry? Is it Phyllida or me?"

"Good heavens, Val——!"

"If it's Phyllida,"—she faced him bravely, though tears shone on her lashes,—“then you must not—must not—— Oh, my dear, you come to me to help you as though I were a—a machine with an intellect—and I do try—I will try—though you've made me a laughing-stock—but I don't mind that, only—— Oh, Aubrey, even if I am a clever woman, I'm only a woman after all——!"

"Don't talk such rubbish," said West irritably as he caught her in his arms. "As if I ever cared a button for any one but you!" He kissed her. His intentions were excellent, but it was a guarantee of his virgin inexperience that he kissed her on the bridge of her nose. But on second thoughts he kissed her again, and this time the fretfulness that was due partly to strained nerves and partly to sheer ignorance of life sobered itself to awe, as if he had felt the passing of a god's wings. His love had been so long repressed, so painfully subdued, he had so schooled himself to ignore it by day and banish it from his dreams by night, that it had been more like a warm friendship than a passion, but West was not naturally cold, and contact broke down his reserve. "I love you, I love you," he murmured: "what rubbish to pretend you didn't know that!"

"You always say it's my fault. . . ."

"So it is. You ought to have known—you must have known—why—why," West stammered, "could we ever be in the same room together and not be conscious of each other? I know I couldn't, could you?"

"No, of course not, but how was I to know you felt it too?"

"Why, I always used to know when you came in even if I couldn't see you; well, not always"—West was nothing if not accurate—"but nine times out of ten. I always knew

you loved me. You couldn't be so silly—— Good heavens, you must have seen it in my eyes every time I looked at you!"

"I never saw anything in your eyes," said Val pettishly; "you never did look at me!"

"I didn't dare. . . . We muffed it somehow. What idiots we were! You were, I wasn't. Although Dan said I was. Perhaps I did take too much for granted," West conceded generously. "I always felt so sure I could make you love me if I only had half a chance"—Val murmured "Oh!" with a little helpless shrug—"Anyhow you know now. I do love you." He felt that he was neither fluent nor original. "I'm not—I can't—I'm not one of those fellows that can——" He gave it up and tried afresh. "What I mean is, you won't mind taking a back seat most of the time, will you? You won't be jealous of my work or want to get in the way of it? Because I couldn't stand that. It has just got to come first—only—only—you will come first all the time, in my heart. You won't mind that, will you?"

"No, no. Oh, how strange you are!" said Val involuntarily. His broken sentences and bits of boyish slang were the very last kind of self-expression she had expected from her self-contained and difficult lover. "Oh no, you needn't explain any more, I understand all about it, and I want you to be a great man quite as much as you want to be one——" "I don't!" West interjected, blushing hotly.—"Yes, you do; don't tell me little lies," Val rebuked him with a tender, maternal severity; "and you needn't be so afraid: the Chief has got me into excellent training: I shall make a first-class politician's wife—that is, if you do want me to marry you? You haven't said anything about it yet, but I suppose you do——"

"No, I don't!"

"What do you say, Aubrey?"

"My dear girl, it's all very well to be romantic," West

said, running his fingers through his hair: he was kneeling up on the window-sill, and with his boyish attitude and rumpled head might have passed for eighteen: "but if Marchmont brings this rotten action, how on earth am I to marry you? Even if he doesn't win it, nine people out of ten will think I'm guilty. Suppose Mr. Vere withdraws my allowance! I can't honestly say I think that's likely, but I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he withdraws the two thousand and Herold. In that case, and if your father sacks me, I shall have to begin life all over again at eight and twenty. Perhaps you think the Chief will let me stay because of you, but the fact remains that I'm his paid servant, and I don't see myself asking him to keep me on because I've made up to his daughter behind his back! I never ought to have said a word to you to-night, and that's the truth, only after what you said downstairs I simply couldn't stick it without. But honestly I don't see any prospect of our getting married, at least for a very long time to come."

"Oh, don't you?" He shook his head. "What an idiot you are!"

"An idiot——? Why?"

"I don't know why," replied Miss Yarborough fiercely, "I can't think why. I wouldn't have believed it if any one had told me. I'm sorry if it annoys you, Aubrey, but I'm going to marry you. I don't care a snap of the fingers whether Lord Marchmont wins the case or not or whether you have two thousand a year or twopence. You're as proud as Lucifer and you've made me wretched for years and years and I won't put up with it any more. I shall tell the Chief to-night. You can come too if you like, but if not I shall go alone. The engagement will be announced at breakfast. And with any luck," she glanced out over the moonlit road, "Dan Marqueray will dispose of Lord Marchmont and get back in time to hear it."

CHAPTER XXV

But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart.

IT was a cold night. But Marqueray was not cold. His blood was fired to conflict. He would have liked a good horse between his knees, taxing every muscle and in tune with every mood, but no thoroughbred could have held or even touched the pace of the racing car. Fortunately Cambridgeshire roads are long and level and broad between their turfy borders, and on this November night, under windless, moonlit, frost-lit skies, they were bare of traffic. Far ahead his powerful lamps flung their beams like the searchlights of a ship at sea, but Marqueray never needed them: when he breasted a low rise, he could read the whole map of country laid out before him in brook and field, willow-line and hamlet, and far plain rising in a ring like the ocean seen from a ship's mast. He had the eyes of a hawk, and could see far and fast; and he was fond of driving by night, and had often done it.

He had a map in his pocket, but he never stopped to consult it. He knew every inch of the ground, and could have taken short cuts, but for the sake of speed he preferred to follow the old coaching road, broad and flat as a coach road should be, which runs south of Cambridge through Trumpington and Harston, and on under a gentle swell of hills by Royston and Ware. At his side telegraph wires unrolled mile after mile their slender, wavy threads, which seemed to dip up and down between pole and pole. Now and again he overtook a country wagon lumbering along to market, which jolted slowly out of his way, while the nodding driver woke up to stare after him with bleared eyes. Now

and again he had to slacken speed as he ran through a village, asleep behind blinded windows, only the blacksmith's dog giving tongue to prove that it was not a village of the dead. Now and again in a coppice he disturbed a whole colony of birds, which came blundering out with a great clatter of wings. Owls traveled over him, sailing mute in steep circles, questing for prey; and once far overhead, late wanderers and strong in flight on those creaking wings which Virgil heard when Rome was mistress of the world, a pair of wild swans, moving camp by moonlight from an Essex marsh to some reedy pool among the slumbrous Midland fens.

Marqueray had over fifty miles to cover, and he ran his first thirty-five in as many minutes, happily without meeting any police. After that he got into suburbs, and from Hoddesdon, though he dodged the worst slums by turning west at Chestnut and south again through Enfield and Islington, his progress was relatively slow. It was getting on for half-past two before he reached the still broad-awake Euston Road, and the clocks were striking all over London when he pulled up in Grosvenor Square. An unconventional calling hour! but Marqueray knew the ways of Marchmont House, which habitually went to bed at dawn and remained wrapped in seclusion till noonday. He looked up into the immense porch and saw manifest signs of life within; the door was not closed, and lamps were still burning. Marqueray got out of his car and rang the bell which Phyllida had rung a few hours before. A night porter answered it.

"Is Lord Marchmont in?"

"His lordship is not at home, sir."

Marqueray looked searchingly at the man, whom he suspected of lying to him under orders. "He was here at half-past eight. Do you mean that he went out and hasn't come in yet?—he can't have gone away."

"His lordship left town to-night, sir."

"What time did he start—did he go by train?"

"No, sir. He left in his motor about an hour ago."

Marqueray stood still for a moment or so reflecting rapidly. "That was a sudden idea, wasn't it?" He slipped his hand into his pocket. "Look here, this is very awkward for me. I want to speak to Lord Marchmont to-night for ten minutes on important business. I'll give you £5 for his address, if you know it, or can get it for me."

The man's thin face twitched as Marqueray's money jingled. "I don't know it, sir, and that's God's truth. None of us do but Mr. Birch the house steward, and he's as close as wax—£5 nor £500 wouldn't get it out of him. His place is too good. But I did see—I don't know if that's worth anything to you—I did see Phillips, the new shover, just before they started, standing out by the motor lamp with his nose glued to a map of South Surrey."

"Hamon House is in South Surrey."

"That's what I thought, sir; and Phillips said to me, 'Mind your own business, Brown,' he said."

"Well worth £5. Have you any idea what took your master off in such a hurry?"

A tip, once taken, must be earned, and after stroking his lip Brown excogitated, if not an explanation, at least a commentary. "He had a lady with him, sir."

"Damnation!" said Marqueray.

He sprang back into the car and was out of sight before the gaping Brown had shut his mouth.

Threading the peaceful squares of the West End, Marqueray got himself in hand again. A lady! how many ladies were there with whom Marchmont might go to Surrey? How could it be Phyllida? Marchmont had not her address: West had refused to give it him and had cautioned Stennis not to let it slip. Besides, even if Marchmont had contrived to get into direct touch with her, was it credible—it was not!—that she would go back to Grosvenor Square without giving Marqueray warning? After

all, she was not a child, and she had read his heart. Idle fear!—and then he came out on Chelsea Bridge again: the bridge-warden's garden, the twin towers and their bays of shadow, and the glossy Thames running brimful and steel-dark under a cold snowy moon and the gem-bright lamps of London. There was Scottish blood in him, and when he flung the car across Chelsea Bridge the curtain that divides the Absolute from the world of here and now seemed to have worn uncomfortably thin: there was the same weight on his mind, and it was making the same distressed response to a cry that he could not quite hear and a hand that he could not quite touch, as years ago in Kiev when his Russian comrade was drowning in a Petrograd canal.

Marqueray pursued his course into Surrey rather faster than he had come up from Cambridge. He knew this way, too, quite well: he knew all the main roads out of London, and Hamon House was in a familiar stretch of country, lying far back among fir woods north of the wide sandy way that runs over the Hog's Back from Guildford to Farnham. It was not such a long run as from Cambridge, and Marqueray reached the lodge gates before half-past three. They were shut, but he was in no temper to be stopped, and for the second time that night the lodge keeper had to come down in his trousers and nightshirt, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. Although Marchmont had had a long start, Marqueray had made up so much time on the road that Kemp had not been able to get warm in bed since turning out before. He very much resented the second upheaval. Marqueray asked no questions. He curtly said that the gates had better be left unlocked as he should be returning in fifteen or twenty minutes, and tossed across a gold coin to sweeten Kemp's vigil.

Marqueray ran the car up the drive, which was bordered on either hand by great groves of Italian trees—ilex, and sweet chestnut, and cypress, their gaps filled from Italy

every spring, if any weakling failed to survive a Surrey winter. Underfoot the lightly frosted gravel was scarred by recent wheel marks. Marchmont's? A bend of the avenue and Hamon House appeared, an Italian palace in white marble, rearing its towers and campanili, ghostly in starshine, over the silver levels of a lake. Crawling along a bridge over those steel-clear mistless waters, which lapped like a moat against the long façade and mirrored in their deep tranquillity all its fanciful delicacy of ornament as well as all the eyes of heaven, Marqueray drew up on a narrow terrace inset before bronze doors, between slender Renaissance columns and tubs containing transplanted orange trees and oleanders. It was not easy to get in or out of Hamon House when those doors were shut, for every window opened over the water. But to-night they were ajar, and looking through them into the chill, gleaming interior, where a fountain splashed and murmured over a Sienese group of water-nymphs, he could see lights burning, their topaz flames at war with the silver clarity of starshine. Lamps for Marchmont's arrival? While Marqueray waited to pencil two words on his visiting card, a servant saw the car outside and Marqueray standing on the threshold.

"Lord Marchmont has just come, hasn't he?" Marqueray's voice had thickened strangely. "Take my card to him and ask him if he can see me for ten minutes."

The man looked doubtfully from the card to Marqueray and back. "It's very late, sir——"

"Thank God!" said Marqueray with smiling irrelevance. Marchmont was there, then. "Not too late anyhow. Your master hasn't gone to bed yet, has he?"

"No, sir. But he's about undressing. He was tired after his journey. Will you step in and take a seat while I find out if his lordship can see you?"

"No, I'll wait here," said Marqueray, sitting down on a marble bench and beginning to whistle *Funiculi funicula*.

He too felt tired—oddly tired, for him: after all, he reflected, it was no joke to drive a racing car almost at racing speed by night along country roads for upwards of ninety miles.—What really had tired him was not the long run from Cambridge but the reaction after the long, racking nerve strain, but he was not going to admit that even to himself.

Suppose Marchmont refused to come down? The two vague words penciled on Marqueray's card would probably bring him down, but if they failed Marqueray was prepared to force his way in. How can one in Georgian England force one's way into a barred house? Marqueray reflected with a hardy smile that among servants and in a conventional setting a man has no need of a revolver to go where he likes, if he has a strong arm, a long purse, and no disinclination to make a noise. But the bronze doors were heavy? One would have to nip through them pretty quickly. After that he defied Marchmont to turn him out till he had satisfied himself that Phyllida was not within.

But it did not come to that. A soft step on the tiles: not the footman, but Simpson, whom Marqueray detested. Simpson, however, was deferential to the last degree. His lordship would be delighted to see Mr. Marqueray: would Mr. Marqueray mind coming to his private room? . . . Marqueray was taken to a room which, like the orange tubs, might have been transplanted from Italy. Leaved windows opened over the shining mere, the surface of which had the slightly warped and curdled aspect that is premonitory of frost. The walls were painted in a fresco of birds, and flowers, and maskers in medieval *lucco* and tunic and hose, dancing against a green landscape and under a spring-colored sky: there was scarcely any furniture except a few brown leather stools and chairs with crossed legs and scrolled ends, and a low couch standing near a carved writing desk: while the lamp which Simpson lit, and which burned rather dimly with a flickering, unpro-

teeted flame, was a bit of fifteenth century iron-work from Maso's forge in Brescia. At angles to the door by which Simpson let in Marqueray, a second entrance, ornamented with the same long leaf-pattern hinges, opened on an inner court and a flight of stairs.

"Hallo, Dan!" It was by this latter door that Marchmont came in a few moments later. "Delighted to see you! Has the car broken down and can I give you a bed?"

"Thanks, no," said Marqueray, affably shaking hands with his enemy—a ceremony which West in his shoes would have shunned like the plague. "I've pursued you from Grosvenor Square——"

"Really? But I came off in a hurry and forgot to leave my address—I wonder how you got it?"

"Oh, by a stroke of luck. I'm a lucky fellow. I must apologize for knocking you up at this unconseionable hour, but my business won't wait and I have to get back to Cambridge by breakfast time."

"What a nuisance!" Marchmont threw himself on a couch within arm's length of the carved desk. "But Simpson shall bring you a drink—No? Well, you must excuse me, for I'm too tired to keep my feet. In fact I was on my way to bed when they told me you were here. Hence the slight irregularity of my toilet." He was in his trousers and shirt. "I was so mystified by your card that I ran down without even waiting to put a coat on. Dear fellow, why and since when 'Marqueray of Lima'?"

"Shall I shut the door?"

Suiting the action to the word, Marqueray shut both doors, then strolled over to the hearth and dropped into a chair. Marchmont, watching, raised himself on his cushions and fidgeted with the lock of the desk.

"You rang up Aubrey West this evening and sent him a most extraordinary message. It was so unexpected that I believe he gave you no intelligible answer. But when he recovered himself, he was annoyed, and he consulted about

it with men who he thought would know better how to deal with blackmailers than he did. Now don't begin to foam at the mouth, March; a blackmailer is what you are, and a peculiarly dirty one because you're blackmailing a lady. Yes. West put the case into the hands of his own chief and Mr. Vere and myself."

"Why you?"

"I'm his cousin, you know."

"You haven't the pleasure of my wife's acquaintance, have you?"

"I've seen Lady Marchmont. But I shouldn't presume to represent her. I represent West. Also, March, it may be more of a surprise to you to learn that I represent Yarborough."

"But I don't see what Yarborough has to do with my wife's misconduct."

This, which would have infuriated West, left Marqueray calm. "I promise you he wouldn't interfere with you if you hadn't interfered with him. He wants to get West into Parliament. Ministers can't afford to lose a bye just now."

"Then," said Marchmont, yawning and crossing one meager leg over the other, "they had better use their influence to persuade my wife to return to me. For one or the other I will have, Dan, either my ducats or my pound of flesh."

"You will have neither," said Marqueray, "and you may thank your stars that some scruple of—I don't know whether to call it class feeling or dislike of a fuss—prevents our hitting back.—Have you heard from Lima lately?"

Marchmont's lizard eyelids flickered. "I haven't the remotest notion what you're talking about. What is Lima, a woman or a horse?"

"How goes it with Hagener and Lindau?" said Marqueray gayly. "Sit down. Sit still, you little swine, and listen to me. Has Lindau cabled to you within the last

day or two? If he hasn't he soon will, for he's more honest than you are, and he wouldn't let you down without warning. But he has let you down, March. Isn't it sad? He has got off the fence on the windy side o' the law. You couldn't expect any better from a man of sixty-five with a liver and a conscience. In fact he couldn't help himself. You know, don't you, that for some time past he's been worried by an unidentified but pretty strong English influence which blocked all his moves? Soon after April that began, didn't it? and Lindau never could find out who it was or how he came to be so remarkably well informed. Lindau now thinks it was the Devil. He doesn't see how any one but Lucifer could have put a selection of your letters into the Government's hands."

Fingering the carven vine-leaves on the high desk, Marchmont, under Marqueray's hammer strokes, had turned as white as his shirt. But at the reference to his own letters he glanced up at Marqueray with his crooked, faint smile.

"After that, of course, there was nothing for it but 'Hands up,' " Marqueray continued in his soft voice, too silken in quality and too lazy to be fierce even when he was baiting Marchmont. "Lindau made a clean breast of it and was let off with a caution. He was only a subordinate and an unwilling one at that. But the bottom has dropped out of the Hagener and Lindau Mining Agency. The Peruvian Government are going to cancel their concession. Yes, they're within their legal rights; but if they weren't, I shouldn't advise you to raise any objection. Nothing would give them greater pleasure than to hang you. They could do it. After the June epidemic they executed several men on not a bit better evidence than they have against Herr Hagener.—Take my advice, March: cut your losses—I'm afraid they won't ruin you—and keep clear of the Pacific seaboard."

"Who the devil are you?"

"Oh, I'm just a casual globe-trotter with a turn for

observation," Marqueray explained. He stood smiling down at his enemy, one hand on his hip, as men often stand who have been in the army: so cutting and so ruthless that an onlooker would probably have begun to pity Marchmont—but it would have been pity thrown away. A physical but not a moral coward, by moral ascendancy Marchmont was not easily overawed.

"Damn you, Dan," he cried, "was it you who betrayed Lindau?"

"Sit still. Yes, it was I."

"You who fought us over the Quixedo railway?"

"Always I, and very much I. Honestly, I've done a lot of political odd jobs in different quarters of the globe, but I never enjoyed any so much as my duel with you. I was occasionally sorry about Lindau," Marqueray continued with a rather cynical frankness, "though I knew that at the bottom of his heart he was sick of you and Ramón and the Reds and would be thankful for a chance to cut adrift. But you, you wretched little reptile! you don't know what honesty means. Yes, March, I know more than Lindau does. I know how you went behind his back and sold him to the Spaniards, as you had already sold us to the Teutonic ring. I know most of what went on out there. I've quite a full dossier of all your small criminal activities. You hadn't pluck enough to be a criminal on a big scale. And you were going to blackmail West, were you? West!" He laughed. "I don't think West has much to fear from you. People who live in glass houses shouldn't—they really shouldn't—chuck about threats of divorce actions. Lady Marchmont and West would survive a decree *nisi*. But with your rotten health I'm not a bit sure how long you would live in jail."

"I haven't done a thing for which you or Yarborough could touch me over here," said Marchmont hardily. "This is all pure bluff, Dan. You must think me excessively simple——"

"I never bluff," said Marqueray. "Chess is my game, I used to play it with Mr. Vere. Have you sent any instructions yet to your solicitor? If you have, I advise you to cancel them as soon as he's out of bed. Otherwise you won't get even the twenty-four hours' grace you offered us. Yarborough is prompt, and I can promise you he's determined. If one whisper of this rotten trumped-up tale about West and Lady Marchmont gets about, you'll be prosecuted for inciting to riot. Have you ever heard of a place called Mile End? Or of an expensive and highly trained professional organizer of the name of Simpson? He's one of those finicking gentlemen who don't care to be paid by check. Shall I give you the numbers of the notes you passed over to him?—There was a woman killed that night, March."

A woman on whose thin hand Marqueray had set his heel. That score written off, he coolly lit a cigar and began to wonder when he would get anything to eat. He had a long and a vindictive memory, but not a sentimental one, and during his hard, adventurous life he had fought his way in and out of too many tight places to lose his temper over what he called "a drawing-room row." All in the day's work! Six months ago, Marqueray had sat at supper with Ramón and de Glehn and other leaders of the insurrectionary movement when a messenger came in with the news that they had been betrayed. One slip, and the English spy would have dropped with half a dozen knife thrusts through his body. He had made no slip, and he had finished his supper. He was not likely, though this was what Aubrey West could never understand, to lose his temper with a man like Marchmont. He was in far greater danger of underrating his enemy. Since Marchmont came in, Marqueray had almost entirely dismissed the fear that had pursued him from town. He still meant to make sure that Phyllida was not in the house, but only as a precautionary measure. Oh, she was safe enough at Harlesden! The

truth being that, face to face with Marchmont, Marqueray simply was not and never had been able to connect him with Phyllida. He knew they were husband and wife, and yet he could not see that Marchmont might have been talking to Phyllida not twenty minutes ago.

"All right—I throw down my cards," said Marchmont slowly. "You're too strong for me. I didn't know I was up against all the resources of the professional spy." Marqueray inclined his head with the ghost of a smile: not in that way could Marchmont penetrate his armor of good-humored scorn. "You impose hard terms. But you've got your knee on my chest, and I can't fight you. I haven't yet sent any instructions to my solicitor, and I shan't send them. West is safe for me."

Marqueray drew a long breath of relief. He had won. Yet he could not take his eyes from Marchmont's face. Marchmont was too meek by half: Marqueray knew from old experience how quick the man was in turns and doublings, how ingenious he could show himself in changing places with his enemy.

"You're surprised? Don't plume yourself too much on your victory, my super-spy,"—Marchmont raised his head from his perpetual fingering of the carved vine leaves and smiled into Marqueray's eyes. "As you've been so frank, I may as well be frank too. You assume that when I spoke to Aubrey this evening I didn't really believe that he had done anything which touched my personal honor—yes, my personal honor, Dan: dear fellow, hasn't your experience of life taught you yet that tampering with a man's wife is the one injury he never forgives? You think it was a trumped-up charge. It wasn't. I believed it. If I believed it now, I should tell you to go to the devil. I should say—'Prosecute me if you like. Send me to prison if you can. I'll willingly pay that price for the luxury of chastising with whips and with scorpions the man who has taken my wife from me. I'm only sorry that I have no better

weapon than the Divorce Court. If I had at hand any that would cut deeper, I'd use it——' ”

He collected himself with a great effort and waited till his breath came more quietly and the rush of blood ebbed from his congested face.

“But I don't believe it any longer, and that's why I throw up the sponge.” He took out a silk handkerchief and wiped his lips. “I wouldn't believe West when he swore he wasn't my wife's lover, but when you swear it too I believe you.”

“You're very kind,” returned Marqueray without visible irony. He was not feeling effusive, and he disliked Lord Marchmont in a complimentary vein.

“Yarborough might be carried off his feet by his hot party feeling, but Vere is a thorough gentleman; I feel sure he wouldn't back up Aubrey if Aubrey were a guilty man. You yourself, Dan, are in the main a straightforward, honorable fellow: you wouldn't take this bullying tone with me, you couldn't look me in the eye as you're doing now, if you were shielding an adulterer. Now do you understand why I'm taking my defeat so coolly? I never was better pleased to see any one in my life than I am to see you.”

He stretched out his hand. Marqueray did not take it. His heart had begun to throb again with the peculiarly thick, heavy beat of fear: his second self had never ceased to feel afraid.

“Shake hands on it, Dan, and stay here to-night: let me give you a room: it's all but three o'clock, and I can't bear to think of your tearing off back to town, or Cambridge is it? after such a long run. Come, old man, let by-gones be by-gones: it's honors easy: I shall be only too delighted to put you up under my roof to-night——”

Cat and mouse. There was no mistaking that deadly smile of Marchmont's.

"Honors easy, is it?" said Marqueray. "How's that?"

"Oh," Marchmont yawned behind his fingertips, "I can't go into it now. I want to go to bed. Wait till the morning——"

"The woman you brought with you from town," said Marqueray, "was it Lady Marchmont?"

CHAPTER XXVI

No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve.

“**N**OW you understand,” said Marchmont, “why I’m so grateful to you for persuading me of Aubrey’s innocence. Yes, my wife has returned to me, Dan, and prettier than ever. Can you wonder at my impatience——? You didn’t know, did you, that you were interrupting a second honeymoon?”

Marqueray shifted in his chair and leaned his cheek on his hand, but not a nerve quivered, nor did he draw back from the light. This must be a chance shot. How could his connection with Phyllida, which had never been known to Gaythorne Stennis, have become known to Marchmont?

“I’m afraid you misunderstood what I said. Yarborough knows nothing of Lady Marchmont, but your own reputation is common property, and he refuses to be a party to your attempt to force her back to you. We all know only force would get her back. Yarborough is prepared to use his knowledge of your indiscretion to protect her as well as West. I suggest that you bring her down, and I’ll make her understand that she’s free to defy you. Then if she likes she can come off with me to-night, or I’ll sit in this room till daylight, and you’ll stay here too. I’m going to see to it that Lady Marchmont isn’t molested.”

“Yes, shall we bring her down?” said Marchmont. “Face to face with both of us, Phyllida will be an interesting psychological study. Will you ask her whether she’d like to go back with you to Whitehall?”

He stood up. Marqueray also rose. “Till this evening

I thought Aubrey was my wife's lover. I know now that you are. She went to your rooms to-night"—Marqueray's lips parted—"no, you weren't there: she knew you weren't there, but she left a letter for you. An artless and affectionate but a damning letter, Dan. A fi-fi letter, with its 'Dearest Dan' and its picturesque touch about the night you spent together in Surrey. People who live in glass houses shouldn't—they really shouldn't—chuck about threats of criminal prosecutions." He took hold of Marqueray by a button of his coat. "My man has shadowed Phyllida for some time, but she didn't give herself away till to-night. It was not till Macbain told me she had been to your rooms, and gave me her letter to read, that I saw daylight. Excellent, chivalrous Aubrey! Naturally he would beg me not to force her back to me. He would be full of sympathy for you. On my word I'm sorry for you myself, and I retract my offer of a bed. No, you had better get back to town. Judging by your eyes, Dan, at this moment, I'm sure you wouldn't enjoy a good night's rest."

"Who sold your man that letter?"

"Your servant. A scamp: get rid of him. He made me pay through the nose for it."

"Did you, or did Stennis, put the screw on Lady Marchmont?"

"Screw you call it? Say an offer of forgiveness, and a very magnanimous offer, too. How often had my wife been to your rooms before?"

"Well, but which was it?"

"Stennis, acting equally in Aubrey's and in Phyllida's interests. Oh, don't curse him: a husband has some rights even in these lax days, and a respectable family solicitor is the last man on earth to back a third party. Besides, if you would take a calm, rational view, you would see how much better it is for Phyllida to return to me. You would have got sick of her sooner or later, and the position of the cast mistress is never enviable, but a wife under her

husband's roof is safe. If she were to have a child it would be my child. It would be born in wedlock. That's better than the alternative, believe me. I'm a judge. I was born in wedlock myself. But one can't expect you to be calm or rational just now."

Marquerau, standing erect while Marchmont fingered a button of his serge jacket, was as cool as he had ever been in his life. His temper was still untouched, and his mind worked with a deadly lucidity. Phyllida was at Hamon House. Another half hour and he would have come too late: but so far she was safe. But he had now no weapon against Marchmont, because when Yarborough heard what Marchmont had to say no more aid would be forthcoming. To protect West, an old friend, an innocent man, and a valuable party supporter, was one thing. To protect Marquerau was quite another, and Yarborough certainly would not do it. On the contrary, both he and Robert Vere would probably be furious to learn how they had been made tools of. No, that adventitious weapon must be dropped.

Insensibly the atmosphere of the room was changing. It had grown so quiet that they could hear the fountain splashing in the courtyard, and a sigh of wind rising in the firwoods across the water as if they sighed in their sleep. Marquerau turned his face towards those moonlit woods and the profound, clear, gray sky above them, full of stars, where the eternal forces of the universe, gravely indifferent to man and his civilization, went on their appointed way. Hamon House was many miles from the coast, and yet his second self heard, or felt, the wash of tides in the air and the beat of waves, as those who have lived on the sea are said to hear it when they come to die. And to these eternal forces he turned when those other forces of the social order, as represented by priest and lawyer and statesman, were bent on delivering the wife to the husband.

Marquerau had truly told West that he was a rebel born

and bred, but his rebellion was an appeal to Cæsar. Taking swift account of the situation, he could find no easy way out of it. Wind and sea and star and his own mind imposed on him the same Cæsarian law that if he broke social rules he would have to pay in the same coin. What price? Renunciation certainly, and perhaps death or disgrace as well. Good, he would pay whatever price was asked. But his eyes were strange. He had taken life in war without a second thought, but it would be a different matter to take life in cold blood and in a private quarrel: yet that contingency had to be faced because he had now no weapon against Marchmont except the Stone Age weapon of indifference to results.

Gently he disengaged Marchmont's fidgeting hand from his coat. "Do you really think I shall go back to town and leave her here?"

"Is any other course open to you? In this civilized century a man can't carry off his friend's wife *vi et armis*; I have servants, Dan."

"I know you have, the merchant who let me in and all the rest of the establishment. The amount of importance attaching to that fact is—what I choose to make it. We're alone in here."

"Are you threatening me?" said Marchmont, turning lividly pale, but defiant: his position was so strong that he did not for one moment believe Marqueray dared touch him.

"I rarely threaten," said Marqueray. "Don't cry out." He seized Marchmont by both wrists, forced him down across the sofa, and bent his right forearm back as he had bent back the arm of the pickpocket at Mile End—not so far, but far enough to bring the sweat out on Marchmont's forehead. "Don't be frightened: I'm not going to damage you so long as you keep quiet, but you had better be careful, because if you struggle I shall go on till the bone snaps. I let go your left hand, do you see? Touch

the bell." Marchmont, ashen-gray and trembling, obeyed. "Now mind," Marqueray went on in his soft, nonchalant voice, "I'm not West, and I don't set too much store on human life, yours or my own. I have the whip hand of you, March, because I'd as lief kill you as not. If you disobey me or lift a finger to summon help, you'll be dead before it comes." He released his enemy and stood behind him as Simpson entered. "You were going to send for Lady Marchmont, weren't you?"

"My compliments to Lady Marchmont, and ask her to come down for a minute."

"I suggest telling your servant not to let Lady Marchmont know I'm here."

"Don't tell Lady Marchmont that any one's here."

Two or three minutes later Phyllida entered by a door from the inner court; a languid Phyllida, her dark hair curling loose on her shoulders, her bare feet thrust into slippers, her small person swallowed up in one of Marchmont's immense fur coats, which wrapped her from head to foot in its bizarre effeminacy of golden sable and wolf skins. She had to hold up the skirts of it in both hands, and, in her strange habit of living for the moment, she was smiling in soft dimples like a child over the comical spectacle she presented. Marqueray had never seen her so pretty, and, if he had never realized it before, he realized now that she was Marchmont's wife. Whatever she suffered in the renewal of their relations,—and for one cruel moment Marqueray wondered whether she suffered at all,—married familiarity made it natural to her to come down to him barefoot and half-dressed and sleepy and rosy from her bath, drops of water glistening here and there among her dark ringlets. Marqueray knew that Marchmont was watching him, but for his life he could not subdue the rush of blood to his face or his involuntary start. Difficult to stand quite still when the knife goes deep!

Phyllida came from a bright stair into a room lit only

by an oil lamp and the external starshine, and in the twilight she could see no one. "Are ye there, Hamon?" she said wearily, bringing balm to Marqueray with the first accent of her beloved little tired voice. "D'ye want me?"

"I want you," said Marqueray, and as she discerned him standing in the shadow behind Marchmont she gave a frightened cry—"Oh, *Dan!*"—and her first thought was to drop her coat over her bare ankles and drag it closer round her throat. If she was no longer shy of Marchmont, she was still shy of Dan. Marqueray from that moment forgot Marchmont. He crossed the room and stretched out his hands to her.

"How could you do this to me, Phyl? How could you leave me without one word?"

"I did write to you, Dan," Phyllida faltered. "Oh, dear, don't be angry with me!"

"Am I ever angry with you?—I am not, you know I never learned the way. Don't teach it me."

"But ye said ye were going to Russia so I thought ye didn't care so much for me any more! D'ye really love me still, Dan?"

Incredulous joy and awe breaking like dawnlight in the wide dark eyes raised to Marqueray's rather stern face. . . . He pressed her small hands against his heart. "Do I love you?—Yes, I love you. Take one of your best bodkins, Phyl, any day you like, and run it in here as deep as you like, but don't desert me again."

"What—what must I do?"

"Come away with me now. I swear I will not touch you. You're sacred to me. If I could I wouldn't win you, so long as you think it wrong. But oh, my darling, you can't stay here. My flower, if I love you too much to wear you myself, you aren't going to ask me to leave you to Marchmont! I can't bear it, Phyl. Truly I can't. I've—mastered myself for you, because I wouldn't put any stain on you. But to leave you here is more than flesh and blood

can stand. Oh, remember that I know—I know I could make you give me all if I liked, you could never resist me if I put out one-tenth of the power I have over you! I'm—I'm breaking myself for you. Oh, my darling, give me something in return! I cannot go away and leave you here."

"D'ye mind so much? Poor Dan! I never thought o' your minding . . . 'tis only the way it was before."

Marqueray gave a short laugh. He let it go at that: he could not explain himself to her, not then, not under the furious curb that he was imposing on himself. "I do mind, very, very much. More than you've any idea of. I'd rather die—I'd rather see *you* die, than leave you here with him. My sweet, come with me!"

"Like this?" said Phyllida wavering:—"oh, Dan, how can I?"

"Are you dressed underneath?—partly? slip on a frock, then, under that egregious garment and button yourself up in it again; March will be happy to lend it you, and it will keep you warm. Run, get a frock and your shoes and stockings and a cap of some sort: you can outfit yourself in London, I'll see to that. Leave it all to me."

"And West?" said Marchmont. "What about West?"

Till then Phyllida had forgotten the existence of West, but now she uttered a low cry. "O! I can't, I can't! O! don't make me do it! He'll ruin Mr. West, and how can I do that——?"

"Rubbish!" said Marqueray. "Shut up, March, or I'll break your neck for you.—Don't listen to him, Phyl. He can't touch West now, and he knows it. Your coming with me saves West. Let him bring his action if he likes; he'll have to name me, not Aubrey. No one on God's earth is going to believe you ran away with the pair of us." Darkly flushed, his arms folded, his eyes sparkling, a laugh on his lips, Marqueray seemed literally to expand and to

tower over Phyllida: poor Phyllida! She was so tired, she really wanted nothing in the world so much as to throw herself into Dan's arms and leave everything to him from her slippers to her conscience. It was not in her to disobey him, and this time he did not scruple to make himself her master. He had played a bold stroke, and won: and the price for Phyllida—her own good name—seemed to him light compared with her submission and horrible degradation if she stayed with her husband. That he, too, would have to pay by the crucifixion of his own manhood was only a working out of the immutable Cæsarian law. "Yes, disgrace, I know. But only before man. If I take you to my rooms he'll get his divorce fast enough: we shan't defend it. But can't you face that, for me? You shall remain spotless."

"Are ye sure—sure he can't hurt Mr. West?"

"Quite sure. It is checkmate for Marchmont."

"Father Ryan'd say me place was with me husband."

"I doubt it, if he'd heard what I've heard to-night."

"And ye won't—ye won't hurt me, Dan?"

"I, hurt you?" said Marquelay. "Not know me yet?—My darling, go."

Meekly Phyllida moved towards the inner doorway.—
"One moment," said her husband.

Marquelay turned round. The carved desk was unlocked and Marchmont had taken from it a small revolver. "Yes, these things happen now and then," he said. "This is my private room in which I always interview unexpected visitors, and, as you see, I'm prepared for them. You will not take my wife out of my house before my eyes, Dan."

Marquelay's hand went instinctively towards his own pocket. But he was not armed. He had kept his promise to Vere.

"Which of us are you going to shoot?" he asked.

"Ah! that's a nice question. My wife, I think. She's

more attached to her life than you are." He leveled the weapon at Phyllida, who screamed. Marqueray stepped into the line of fire.

"Out of the house with you, Phyl."

"Not without you," said Phyllida.

"Yes, go, dear, go. I'm very glad to give my life——"

But he had no immediate intention of giving his life. He turned on the last word and with one tiger spring flung himself on Marchmont. Morphia does not conduce to steadiness of nerve. Marchmont fired twice as Marqueray sprang, but missed, and before he could fire again Marqueray struck the revolver out of his hand. It fell to the floor. Marqueray picked it up and sent it spinning far out through the splintering glass and half across the lake. Then, lifting Marchmont like a child, as he had once lifted Aubrey West, Marqueray carried him over to the window with the manifest intention of pitching him after the weapon. Marchmont, his flare of courage gone with the unfair odds which his weapon gave him, shrieked and struggled. "It's deep water—Dan—I can't swim!"

Marqueray smiled as he drew back his arm and braced his body for the swing. "I never supposed you could."

Civilization apart, life or death, creation or destruction is the crown and flower of manhood. If he could not marry the woman he loved, he could at least kill the man he hated.

"Oh, Dan! Oh, if ye love me——!"

"He fired at you."

"No, no! Oh, ye promised ye'd always do as I asked——!"

"This too?" said Marqueray.

He let Marchmont fall: but he was whiter than Marchmont, and he reeled and had to steady himself with one hand on a chair. "I forgot he was your husband."

He collected himself. It was time. Attracted by the shots, half a dozen servants had come hurrying in, and

with them Macbain the detective, Statham, without whom Marchmont never stirred, Simpson. . . . "There's no harm done," said Marqueray, rather cooler than usual. He pointed to Marchmont, who had already staggered to his feet. "Come, Phyllida." He put Statham aside and crossed the outer court to his car. In that irregular household, and failing direct orders from its master, no one felt sufficiently sure that Marchmont was being wronged to offer any resistance, for, as Macbain remarked later to Statham, "if there was any deevilry going on, his lorrdship was likely to have a chief hand in it," and so Marqueray went out unopposed, taking Marchmont's wife with him. He had to lift Phyllida, trembling now and almost fainting, into the car. He was just going to get in himself when Marchmont, pushing his servants aside and impatiently throwing off Statham, appeared in the main doorway.

"You were too rash, Dan," he said, and raising a second revolver he fired again, point-blank, from the threshold. Marqueray without a cry or an effort to save himself dropped down partly on the terrace flagstones and partly across the near wheel. Marchmont was shifting his weapon for another shot when Macbain seized him. Despite his fragile physique it took half a dozen men to disarm him, and while they were struggling he staggered back into the hall and swung to the heavy bronze doors behind him, before Statham or any of the horror-stricken servants could get out to Marqueray.

From within the bronze doors came a confused noise of stamping, cursing, and outcry. But on the moonlit terrace there was no stir, no movement except Phyllida's weak and vain struggle to raise Marqueray in her arms.

"Yes, dear, yes," said Marqueray thickly.

"Oh, Dan, ye aren't dead!" said Phyllida.

"Where am I? Oh, I remember now, Marchmont shot me," said Marqueray. He tried to get up, but slipped

down on both knees on the pavement instead. "I was an ass not to think of that second gun. As if they didn't always grow in pairs. Help me up, darling, give me your hand." Phyllida gave him, not her hand, but both arms under his armpits. Marqueray set his teeth and dragged himself to his feet, but he could not stand. "They'll be out in a minute," he said, glancing up at the house. But it gave no sign of life. All its windows overlooked the water, and Marchmont in his determination to prevent Statham from going out had slipped the spring of the bronze door. Marqueray staggered up into the car and dropped into his own place. There for a minute he sat still, his teeth clenched on his underlip. "Start her, Phyl, you know the way."

"Oh, Dan, ye can't drive her!"

"I do not leave you here," said Marqueray. "Do as I bid you, dearest."

She obeyed, and after another moment or so Marqueray took the wheel, backed the car, turned her on the narrow terrace—a delicate maneuver with not eighteen inches to spare—and ran her rapidly across the bridge and under the moon-flecked ilex arches of half an hour ago. The lodge keeper, up and waiting at his post, stared in surprise after Marqueray's remarkable pallor and Phyllida's uncovered throat and flying hair, but it was not for him to intervene, and Marqueray passed out into the open road. He took the way west towards Farnham, his hand steadying itself as the car gathered speed and the white highroad began to slip away behind him.

"Oh, Dan, stop, stop!" said Phyllida. "Let me bind your wound up."

"I shan't go on again if I once stop," said Marqueray: "no, darling, don't be afraid. I'm all right. I can do it. I've done it before, I think,—ages ago,—and I hadn't you with me then."

"Ye'll bleed to death."

He put his hand down over his left thigh. "There isn't much blood. He splintered the bone but missed the artery."

"But where——? Ye can't—oh, Dan! where are you going? To any town that's near, my darling: or no, stop on the way—stop at the first surgery we come to—I'm not afraid o' Hamon, I shall be quite, quite safe."

"You will be safe nowhere now except at Cambridge. March is—not sane, my darling. He has never been quite like other men, and morphia has finished him off. I would not trust you. Let me think where we are." They were slipping gently at a deceptive pace along the high hill road from Guildford to Farnham, and southward far below them the Surrey weald in belt of dim forest and misty gray of plain lay stretched out league after league under the immense moonlit sky and its unalterable rank on rank of stars. "Not across town now: and it's as well: I don't know that I could have taken the car across town. We'll cut up north by Staines and Hatfield. Take out the map, Phyl, and hold it where I can check my course by it now and again. It's in my pocket."

She slipped her fingers into his pocket and drew the map out—stained.

"Dan, if ye love me——!"

"Because I love you." He laid his own hand for a moment over hers. "I shall win through. Now don't talk to me any more, there's my darling."

Morning: and white mist along Cambridgeshire lowlands: and autumnal webs of gossamer spun thick and brilliant over the faded fields of Herold. As they turned in at the stone gateway Marqueray sounded his horn three or four times. If West was up, he would recognize the deep hum of the racing car and the brazen challenge which cleared the road before it. Already nine o'clock, yet the house was evidently still half asleep: but West was not

sleeping late: perhaps he had not slept much: nor for that matter had Robert Vere. They were standing together on the broad shadowed steps as the car came up the avenue. "Good heavens, is Dan drunk?" said Vere. "He'll capsize her if he doesn't mind."

Marqueray was driving with singular apparent recklessness, taking the grassy border of the park first on one side and then on the other. He had held a straight course along the road, but in every race it is in the last lap that men collapse. The car as he brought her round the bend lurched so violently that the near wheels left the ground and Phyllida was thrown against him. He swung across and drew up crookedly at random, some way from the steps, and dragged himself out without waiting for Phyllida to descend. West and Vere were at his side in a moment.

"What the devil's the matter, Dan?" exclaimed Vere, seizing his arm.

"'Laurel victory,'" quoted Marqueray, turning to West. "Look after her, Aubrey—swear you won't let Marchmont get her back!"

"Never," said West, recognizing in a flash that Marqueray had rehearsed that speech and was waiting for his reply. "But, good heavens——!"

"You win; I've spiked his guns. Oh! I cannot——" said Marqueray. He dropped on one knee, dragging his weight out of Vere's grasp. Phyllida flew to him, but her child's strength was not equal to the task of supporting Marqueray. "Lift him—lift him," she cried; "don't let him fall: oh, Dan, be brave another minute——!"

"You're safe," said Marqueray, pitching forward on the gravel. He closed his eyes and fainted.

"What has happened?" said West, putting his arm round Phyllida, while Vere, on his knees beside his nephew, loosened Marqueray's collar and opened his shirt.

"Me husband shot him," said Phyllida. "Here," she touched her thigh, close to the hip. "He's weak from pain

and shock and loss of blood." She laid her cool hand on Marqueray's heart. "Get a door off its hinges to lift him on: and your stick, Mr. West, for a splint. . . . Now let you and Mr. Vere carry him to his room. Ye take his knees, Mr. West, and let Mr. Vere carry him by the shoulders, it'll be easier for you that way." Marqueray moaned as they raised him. "Quietly, quietly," said Phyllida, coupling her hands under the broken bone, "remember 'tis a broken man you're lifting." With difficulty—for Marqueray's dead weight was a tax on even Robert Vere's tough muscles—they got him to his room and laid him on the bed: and there Phyllida took undisputed possession. It was her small, steady, tremorless hand that cut the clothes from Marqueray's side and bathed and dressed the wound.

"I wish the surgeon won't be long. D'ye know anything of gunshot wounds?" she asked of Robert Vere, who looked ten years older for the shock.

"Too much," said Vere, turning away. He had not known before how precious Marqueray's life was to him.

CHAPTER XXVII

Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

THIRTY-SIX hours later Aubrey West was, by a decent majority, elected member for South Cambridgeshire; and so Marqueray came out of his long duel with Marchmont victorious on either issue. West did not much care. Later on, no doubt, he would recover his waned interest in his own good fortune, for the dearest of friends must ultimately stand second to a man's own place in the world and his material welfare and happiness: there are but one or two ties—perhaps for a hardworking, ambitious man like West there is no tie—strong enough to take precedence of the claim of his career. But for the time all scenes were rather kaleidoscopic and visionary, and even when West was dragged out to thank his constituents from the balcony of the National Club in Madingfield market-place, while the uproar of cheering died down and an excited crowd hung on their new member's lips, he never for one minute lost the memory of the quiet room at Herold where Marqueray was laid.

There were naturally no festivities under Robert Vere's roof that night. He and West drove home together almost in silence. Newsboys were crying their late editions about the streets of Madingfield, and Vere bought a *Cambridge Evening News* to see what it had to say about the election, but he had not patience to find the place, and in the end he thrust it into his pocket unread and forgot about it. Vere was not like himself in those days: wretched when he stayed at home, restless when he went out with West, at

all times fretful and absent-minded, he could not be soothed except by Phyllida. He knew all the truth now: West had told it to him and Yarborough, while Marqueray lay on an improvised operating table under the hands of a Harley Street surgeon. "Dan, of all men!" was Vere's bewildered comment.

As the car turned the bend of the drive both West and Vere glanced up at the high front of Herold: were the blinds drawn? No, they were not drawn, lights flashed in several windows. Marqueray was not dead, then.

"No change?" said Vere to the servant who opened the door of the car.

"No change, sir."

Vere went slowly upstairs with the heavy, dragging tread of an old man, and leaning one hand on the balustrade. Noiselessly he opened the door of Marqueray's chamber and peeped in. It was ten o'clock, and the room was arranged for the night: a stripped room, curtains and carpet removed, every window wide open, a shaded lamp burning on the table. At first Vere thought there was no one in it except Marqueray, but West touched his arm to indicate Phyllida, kneeling upright in shadow, her rosary slipping slowly through her small, earnest fingers. Vere had telephoned to Cambridge for two trained nurses, and they were held in reserve, but neither Vere, nor West, nor the Cambridge doctor, nor Lysaght of Harley Street himself had been able to turn out Phyllida. Indeed, after cross-examining her Lysaght had curtly said she had far better stay where she was. He had a desultory knowledge of Marqueray of many years' standing,—they had been fellow students at Heidelberg in the days before the war,—and his trained eye, always on the watch for the subtle nerve-links between physiology and temperament, discerned in Phyllida a power over Marqueray which cannot be bought for three or four guineas a week, and which is regaining its credit in a psychological age. It would not

have outweighed incompetence, but Lysaght found Phylida cool, deft, and practical as well. Even in sticking to her post day and night she gave none of the trouble of an amateur nurse. She did not seem to need more sleep than she could get by dozing in an armchair, or more refreshment than hot baths and a professional absorption of food. In a day or two, she said, there would be time to rest—one way or the other. Meanwhile she prayed, and interpreted Marqueray's faint desires when no one else could read them, and watched every flutter of his apathetic eyelids and every throb of the overtaxed heart.

The door was already ajar, her back was turned to it, Vere had made no sound, but her senses, delicately strung, registered apparently the very vibration of the air, for she rose at once and came softly across the room to speak to them. "No, no change," she murmured, unconsciously echoing the servant's phrase: "certainly none for the worse; I don't know but what he lies a little easier. Since one o'clock he hasn't been moaning so much, and I've given him a little more milk than he had yesterday. Oh, Mr. West, 'tis the night of the election, I declare I forgot! Are ye in?"

"I am in, yes."

"I'm so glad. Dan'd be glad, too, if he knew. Come in and look at him, he won't be disturbed, he's between asleep and insensible."

West and Vere stood looking down at the wreckage that was left of Dan Marqueray. He lay without moving, stretched flat on a mattress raised an inch or so at the foot: it required a keen eye to perceive that he still breathed: his features, drained of blood, and sunk in so that the bones of the skull and jaw stood out under the skin, were so frightfully altered that West would hardly have known him: the shock and exhaustion had been very great, and Lysaght had let fall the word "heart failure." His right arm was thrown out across the sheet and the

fingers were bent; insensible and weak as a newborn infant, his body still remembered its iron grip on the wheel. When he was slowly coming round—so slowly that at first the Cambridge doctor thought he never would come round—from the anæsthetic on the operating table, Phyllida heard him babbling to himself about cross-cuts and names of villages on the road from Farnham to Cambridge. But he lay now sunk fathoms deep in oblivion.

Vere could scarcely restrain his tears. There is no impotence so cruel as that in which the strongest and bravest of us are compelled to watch a beloved life slipping away inch by inch across the eternal border. All Vere's energy and resolution—and he was a man very much used to getting his own way—were of no avail now. He could not stay Dan's waning strength or recall the wandering spirit from its dreary, unknown journeys. Vere was not ashamed to show his feelings, but no one except Val knew what bitter regret ached under the quiet manner of Aubrey West. "I shall always feel that I didn't do Dan justice," he had said to Val, "and in a way I can see that I never should. I found out to-day from Mr. Vere that Dan tricked me over Herold. I don't like being tricked, and I still feel disgusted with him for it, and it makes me want to chuck Herold back at him. I always shall hate Dan's tricks. All the same, he's the most unselfish fellow I ever knew, and I'm not fit to black his boots."

Phyllida had not the amateur's desire to be eternally touching her patient or smoothing his sheet. She stood looking down at Marqueray with a detached, impartial glance, though under it burned Heaven knows what still and steady flame of devotion.

"I don't like the pulse rate," she said in the low, blunted murmur that could not, alas! break Marqueray's heavy apathy. "Dr. Lysaght has been what he calls winding him up with strychnine again, but it didn't do any good, and he's very, very low. If it weren't Dan, ye

would think he didn't care to fight. He never complains of anything except being tired. That sounds so strange, from Dan! 'Tis the pain, I suppose. But he's not in pain now. See how still his darling face is."

"Too still," Vere groaned under his breath. "Aubrey, Aubrey, the boy's going!"

"I would not be so sure," Phyllida answered with a gentle confidence. "Dan's healthy, ye see, he has a big reserve of strength. Dr. Lysaght says—I've seen it meself—when ye're very strong like Dan is ye can live weeks on your own strength. The way some people starve much quicker than others. Dan'd have died in the car if he hadn't been so brave and so set on going on. Dan is brave, he never will give in."

"You little comforting thing," Vere murmured, "and who's to comfort you?"

"Nobody, I won't need any comfort either way," said Phyllida serenely.

She stole back with them to the door. "Ye go down and get some supper: have either of you had anything to eat? I knew ye wouldn't! Ye go down, Mr. West, and tell Val all about the election, and make Uncle Robert go with you; is that the evening paper? Val will love to see it, there'll be your speeches in it. Ye read them to her. And then go to bed, really to bed, both of you, and get a good night's rest, please our Lord and the Blessed Virgin—I'll tell you, I'll send and tell you both if there's the least wee-wee sign of change, if he wakes up or if he looks as if he were going away without saying good-by—but I'm sure he won't do that. Me? Oh, I'm not tired!" She smiled and shook her head. "D'ye think I'd be tired while I've Dan to look after?"

The men went down, and Phyllida resumed her vigil. It was a wild night: the blind was up, but the moon was on the other side of the house and half buried in cloud: a high wind thundered through the oaks and chestnuts of

the park, and tore off the sere leaves and sent them whirling like flocks of birds through the air. Now and again one came sailing in and fell on the floor, or on the table where Phyllida's lamp burned steadily, or on Marqueray's bed. Phyllida sat down by him, her rosary idle on her knee. She had said all her Aves and her Paternosters, she had commended his soul and her own to the guard of all holy angels, and now there was nothing to be done but to keep her loving watch over him, and moisten his lips from time to time with such nourishment as she could compel or coax him to take. The slow hours wore on. . . .

"Phyl."

His eyes were still shut, not the flicker of an eyelid had warned her that he was awake. Phyllida's heart bounded. But her voice was serene. "I'm here, Dan dearest."

"Touch me," said Marqueray. Mindful of her promise, Phyllida had risen to ring the bell. But his voice, the ghost of a voice, a mere thread of broken breath, kept her at his side. She slipped her fingers into his bent hand, and then feeling that she had not given him enough she knelt down and leaned her cheek against his. Marqueray sought her lips. He tried to raise his arm, apparently to throw it over her, but he could not do it.

"Drink some milk, my darling," said Phyllida, pouring a few drops into his mouth.

"I can't swallow it," said Marqueray. "My handkerchief, please. I'm so sorry." He opened his eyes as she wiped his lips. "Phyl, my darling, I'm going out this time. . . . A pity, isn't it? We could have been so happy. Don't, don't leave me."

"A moment, Dan, I promised I'd tell Uncle Robert and Mr. West," explained Phyllida. She rang the bell and returned to him.

"I don't want any one but you," Marqueray murmured ungratefully.

"We mustn't think only of ourselves. But, Dan, ye

mustn't talk about dying! Your leg's going on beautifully. You're soon going to get well."

"M'm. . . . Well at peace, my sweetheart. . . . Judging by my sensations, I should think half an hour might see the end of it. . . . Queer. . . . I shall then be wiser than all the Dons of Trinity. I'm not afraid, but I am infernally curious. 'Wonder if I shall see old Serge again?'"

"But, Dan,"—she was cold now, and trembling,—“that isn't brave or kind of you to talk so. You're not fighting. Any one would think ye wanted to go away and leave me!"

He raised his eyes, brilliant with pain more of the mind than of the body. "But you aren't mine and you can't come to me. I may die in your arms, Phyl, but I mustn't live in them."

Phyllida's heart was riven. She gave a great panting sob and sank down by him. "Oh, Dan, d'ye want me so? Can't ye be content without that? I wouldn't care if we were never married at all if ye would only stay living. Oh, 'tis too, too cruel! Oh, would ye try to live if I would come to you?"

"No," said Marqueray slowly. "I wouldn't take you stained. It is I that refuse you, not you that refuse me. Beloved . . . my sweet one, don't cry. Soon be over. This damned pain . . . I can't think . . . I should like some one to say the *otkhodnaya*. . . ."

Men do not live or die by their own choice. Yet the will to live does in a recognized though incalculable way reinforce the weakness of the flesh, and it was this handfast on life which Marqueray, in his physical and mental exhaustion, was letting slip. Never in his life before had he refused to fight, but in this hour, when all lights burned dim, the passive and fatalistic Russian temperament betrayed him. For Phyllida and for West he had won his duel with Marchmont, but he had broken his own will in doing it: what is left in the world if one can neither marry the woman one loves nor kill the man one hates? He was

resigning himself to death, and death was visibly setting its mark on his face. Vere coming into the room, still, oddly enough, holding the evening paper in his hand, saw it and uttered a loud exclamation. Marqueray's eyes, always dimly humorous even through exhaustion and suffering, ranged from Phyllida to Vere, and on to Aubrey West, and from West to Lysaght and Valentine Yarborough standing in the doorway.

"A levee," he murmured, and then, the old keen interest in worldly affairs reasserting itself before it flickered out forever, "are you in, Aubrey?" West nodded. "H'm . . . well, I'm out," said Marqueray. He shut his eyes and lay still.

"My God, he's gone!" said Vere. "Can't tell him now, can we, Aubrey? We're too late."

"Tell him—this? Oh, not now!" said West, repelled. It was too evident that the world's news was for Marqueray's ear no longer: and least of all such news as West had just learned, cynical in its mockery and cruel in its triumph. Lysaght felt Marqueray's wrist, held it for a few seconds, let it fall, and touched Phyllida's hand.

"Lady Marchmont, come away," he said gently. Phyllida started. "Come," said Lysaght. "You'll only distress yourself by waiting any longer. You can do nothing more."

"Ye mean——?" She uttered a faint shriek. "'Tisn't true! He hasn't said good-by to me. Dan, speak to me, I'm frightened." She cowered down by Marqueray as if the arm that had protected her in life could still protect her against death. "Dan, I want you, I want you, come back directly!"

"Look there now!" said Lysaght, startled out of his professional calm. He, too, had thought the last moment gone, but Marqueray's breast lifted in a long respiration and his eyes reopened; their gaze was dim but settled, it was not the weird stare with which men look into the next

world, but the expression of an undying human love. There was not a sound in the room except Phyllida's convulsive weeping.

"Don't cry," said Marqueray. He tried again to raise his arm and throw it over her, and again failed. Phyllida crept a little closer to him, nestling her wet cheek against his throat. "Don't cry, my child," Marqueray repeated. "I seem always to make you cry."

"Oh stay, Dan, stay. Don't, don't, don't leave me, I can't bear it."

"Can't be left, eh?" said Marqueray.

He turned his head towards Phyllida and set his teeth on his underlip with the wrenched, painful resolution with which he had clenched his hand over the wheel. "But, my sweet, you're safe."

"No, no, I'm not safe without you. 'Tis so awfully lonely if ye die from me and leave me all alone. Ye must wait for me—ye must!"

"Oh damn, I don't want to," Marqueray murmured.

"Can you get him to take a teaspoonful of brandy?" said Lysaght in a low, urgent voice.

Marqueray shuddered. "Really I can't, Phyl. Too much fag."

"Oh Dan, ye're selfish. Ye can't please me!" remonstrated Phyllida.

She got the brandy drop by drop between his lips. He struggled against it, against her; but he was struggling with himself too; by the painful effort with which his constricted throat forced itself to swallow, Lysaght saw that his will was resuming its iron rule. It was not in Marqueray to deny Phyllida any petition, and since she was frightened and unhappy, and could not feel safe without him, he came back to protect her. "Hungry, and barren, and sharp as the sea" his love had been to him, but for Phyllida it was an exhaustless fountain of strength and consolation.

Lysaght, a psychologist like all healers of men, was giving hurried fresh directions to the Addenbrooke nurse when West drew him to the window. "What about telling him now?" he whispered, "or will the shock kill him?"

"His wound may kill him. Shock of that sort won't," said Lysaght curtly. "Yes, tell him, and then I'm going to turn you all out of the room except Lady Marchmont.—You there, nurse? Hot water ready? All right, thank you.—I thought he was gone in that collapse, but I'm not so sure now." He went out for a minute. West turned to Robert Vere, but Vere, his handsome gray head carried high, was visibly near to breaking down. West was made differently and would have watched his wife die without weeping. His voice was natural and steady when he bent over Phyllida. "My child, there's news for you and Dan, too. Can you stand it?"

"What's that?" said Marqueray, feeling Phyllida start.

"Lord Marchmont is dead," said West. Phyllida looked up at him, trembling and terrified. "Mr. Vere has just seen it by accident in the evening paper. Yes, I'm afraid he has killed himself. Morphia poisoning. They found him in his room this morning. It must have been sheer terror, Dan, he was afraid of what would happen if . . ."

"If I died," murmured Marqueray. "Gad, I never thought of that!"

"Oh, poor Hamon! Oh, poor Hamon!" Phyllida faltered; "oh, how dreadful!—Oh Dan, ye don't look a bit sorry!"

"Sorry? Sorry be shot!" said Marqueray.

His teeth fast clenched on his lip, but his blue eyes sparkling with mischief, he turned himself into Phyllida's clasp—"Oh, Dan, lie still!" Phyllida gave a little scream—and this time he raised his arm and threw it over her neck. "Mine," he said. "I win."

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